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Queer Moments: the Profound Politics of Performance

by

Dafydd James

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Performance

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into the relationship between 'queerness', profundity and the politics of performance. In what ways might moments of performance be both 'queer' and 'profound'? What are the conditions most likely to produce such moments, and what are the political repercussions of such ephemeral performance events? It challenges the notion that live theatrical performance is non-reproductive, arguing that 'queer moments' produce resistant and transformative 'excess of truths', generated through paradoxes.

In analysing 'queer moments', this thesis engages in detail with a series of live performances viewed primarily through the recent work of Judith Butler, though it also draws on writings in deconstruction, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and queer studies. The chapters work towards a final performative experiment: an attempt to communicate in writing a sense of a 'queer moment' beyond/beside language and representation, which I believe I experienced whilst watching Lia Rodriguez's production *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* in 2002.

To prepare the reader for this final chapter, the thesis presents a series of case studies. Analysing a work by transgendered performance artist Lazlo Pearlman, it argues that a deconstructive approach to the body in performance is limited. Although the body is primarily recognised through language and representation, there is a 'materiality' (the 'feeling body') that exists beside/beyond those modes of recognition. Investigating three of performance artist Franko B's works, the thesis next demonstrates how performance might produce a 'ghost of the queer subject'; that is to say, a sense of the feeling body in moments akin to Roland Barthes's 'punctum'. This potentially challenges the subject/other hierarchy between performer/spectator through 'visceral imaging', which I characterise as imaging a sense of the other through one's own viscera. La Fura dels Baus' XXX is analysed to assess how the group's apparent inability to deconstruct its representations and circuits of desire severely compromised its potential for causing audiences to 'see feelingly'. Martin Crimp's playscript *Attempts on her Life* and its performance in a Welsh-language adaptation are analysed to explore how acts of translation can reflexively and *ethically* mediate performance to reveal common human vulnerabilities as part of an embodied ethico-political practice. Queer moments are identified as utopian instances within such processes: paradoxical truths produced by live performance, which survive the ephemeral event.

Introduction

In August 2002, at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival, I attended a performance entitled *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* by Lia Rodriguez's Brazilian dance company at St Stephens Church. Approximately one third into the performance – as its seven performers stood naked in a linear formation, inviting the audience to gaze at the bodies they encountered – I experienced what I have now come to term a 'queer moment'. At the time I had only a cursory knowledge of queer theory, and perhaps intuition, to guide my thinking about that event¹; however, because this moment seemingly touched and moved me, whilst simultaneously presenting a 'queer' vision of human subjectivity, I became convinced that what had happened carried profound implications for understanding the 'politics of performance'². This thesis is an investigation into why I am compelled to call that moment 'queer', why it might simultaneously be termed 'profound', and why deconstructing this instance of intense experience might contribute to understandings of performance and politics.

Paradoxes: ghosts and the excess of truth(s)

Queerness, profundity and politics and their relationship to performance are substantive subjects and I will be investigating a variety of theoretical frameworks and definitions to clarify my usage of these terms in Chapter 1. It might be useful, however, to briefly reference the work of performance theorist Alice Rayner and

¹ Here I understand intuition to be 'where we locate the sort of knowledge that has been hard thought for and that we find worth trusting' (Kelleher, 2009: 9-10).

² Chapter 1 will investigate this term in further detail. Furthermore, this introduction will explore how the thesis offers an alternative way of thinking about 'the politics of performance' than that proposed by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993).

practitioner Jerzy Grotowski, as it will allow an initial brief engagement with what I mean by the 'queer moment'.

In *Ghosts* (2006), Alice Rayner argues that:

The figure of the ghost accounts for a specific force that cannot be identified simply as imitation or a representation. What Artaud sought in his impossible Theatre of Cruelty was to end theatre as imitation and to give flesh to the force of the ghostly double that constitutes theatre.

(Rayner, 2006: x)

What I aim to demonstrate through this thesis is that queer moments can momentarily produce *a ghost of a queer subject*; that is to say, a notion of subjectivity in performance that exists beyond representation (and language).

Although such a presentation is seemingly impossible, as Rayner notes with reference to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty³, I will argue that the queer moment is a provisional materialisation of this 'impossibility' when the 'absence' of such a queer subjectivity is indicated by a tangible 'presence'. Notions of subjectivity and their relationship to 'queerness', 'representation', 'language' and 'presence' are complex topics, the breadth and scope of which cannot be dealt with in this introduction though they form the mainsprings of this thesis. The ghost of the queer

³ For a further discussion of the relationship between Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and queer theory cf. Robin Mark Griffith's *Queer in(g) Performance: Articulations of Deviant Bodies in Contemporary Performance* (2002).

subject provides an initial metaphor that allows me to begin putting these terms, with all their challenges, into play.

With the ghost of the queer subject, I will both problematise and develop Jerzy Grotowski's claim that performance can produce an 'excess of truth' (1968: 53). In his theatre manifesto *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) Grotowski privileges an idea of performance as self-revelation. As Philip Auslander summarises in his essay 'Just Be Your Self' (2002):

[Grotowski] is concerned with the relation of the 'mask of lies' we wear in everyday life to the 'secret motor' behind the mask (1968: 46, 52). By confronting the everyday self with 'its deep roots and hidden motives' (52), Grotowski hopes to produce revelation, 'an excess of truth' (53) ... This act of self-exposure and sacrifice is an invitation to the spectator to do the same thing on a less extreme level, to discover and confront the truth about herself (37).

(2002: 57)

Auslander argues that Grotowski's notion of self is grounded in metaphysical assumptions that regard 'presence' as an undisputable fact which articulates the 'truth' of our being. Conversely, Auslander argues with reference to Jacques Derrida's theories on 'logocentrism' and 'différance' that when we speak of acting in terms of presence 'we are referring metaphorically to the creation of "self" from the play of

difference which makes up theatrical discourse' (2002: 58).⁴ The 'self' is a product of the language and representations that constitute theatre; it is not a foundation on which those representations are built.

I place my account of the subject in performance through queer moments in-between Grotowski's 'excess of truth' and Auslander's deconstructive position. The notion of 'truth' that Grotowski advocates *could* also problematically describe the agendas of propagandistic, didactic or totalitarian performances, playing into theological ideas of divine knowledge or fascist ideals (Berghaus, 1996: 1-10). I will therefore argue that queer moments produce 'excess of *truths*' about the subject, which can leave politically charged traces after the event. In referencing such 'traces' I gesture towards a crucial part of my argument, which proposes that performance is 'productive' in its durational capacities.

To begin understanding how such 'traces' might be generated through performance let me briefly introduce a key characteristic of the queer moment: the paradox. A paradox is 'a statement or proposition which on the face of it seems self-contradictory, absurd, or at variance with common sense, though, on investigation or when explained, it may prove to be well founded (or, according to some, though it is essentially true)' (OED, Vol. XI: 185). Baz Kershaw writes that 'the paradox can be a positive step that includes but travels beyond the binaries of body and mind, female and male, nature and culture and

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Derrida's theories of 'logocentrism' and 'differance' in relation to performance cf. Chapter 1. For further discussion of Auslander's critique of Grotowski cf. Chapter 2.

all the rest that dog ecological wisdom' (2007: 23). Strong paradoxes produce a bind between contradictory elements, which includes and yet moves beyond binaries; two seeming oppositions co-exist in productive relation to each other, for example: a sadist is someone who is kind to a masochist (Hughes and Brecht, 1975: 12). So, as paradoxes negotiate conceptual dualisms, I will argue that it is possible to experience paradox through the doubling of performance and I will attempt to *translate* these performative paradoxes into writing. Perhaps in such moments we might discover, as Picasso once said, that art is a lie that makes us realise the truth (Hughes and Brecht, 1975: 59), or, in the case of this thesis, the excess of truths about subjectivity.

Just as paradoxes can generate an excess of truths that overrides the illogical dualisms of their construction, so the queer moment leaves its excess in the form of, to extend the ghostly metaphor, visceral shiver. Whereas Grotowski and Rayner's use of 'ghost' and 'truth' provide loose metaphors to gesture towards performative experiences – which are potentially akin to queer moments – the inter-disciplinary framework of this thesis provides a more precise theoretical perspective through which to understand such moments. I therefore attempt to transform tropes of analytical evasiveness into productive reference points for deepening our understanding of live performance⁵.

⁵ The recent 'Theatre and Ghosts' conference at the University of York (July 1st - 3rd, 2011) indicates a further move in this direction.

Utopian Performatives

This thesis makes the case that the trace left by the queer moment, its intensity of *feeling* – as a source of ethical (or empathic) inspiration – is political. The resonances left by queer moments offer an embodied memory and reminder of what it is that we might work towards in the hope that such instances might be experienced again, in different forms, in different environments. In this respect, queer moments seem to be echoed in Jill Dolan’s investigation of ‘utopian performatives’: ‘those transforming moments ... that imagine and embody the world in “what if” rather than “as is”’ (2005: 88).

For Dolan, the utopian performative is a moment of profoundly moving experience, instances of ‘liminal clarity and communion, fleeting, briefly transcendent bits of profound human feeling and connection’ (2005: 168). Utopian performatives are also political because they allow participants to ‘imagine a different, putatively better future’ (2005: 168) and, as I will argue for queer moments, they potentially produce the *condition* for action. She suggests that utopian performatives are political through their affective power: ‘we too often flounder on the shoals of “what does this *do*” when how something *feels* in the moment might be powerful enough’ (2005: 170).

I am profoundly inspired by Dolan’s work and the generous and utopian register of her writing; but though I share her interest in tracing the relationship between feeling and politics I would argue that *Utopia in Performance* does not have the theoretical grip that it needs for her utopianism to become discursively convincing. This is partly because Dolan chooses to imagine the utopian performative as a communal

experience, to assume the *communitas* of the experience. For her the utopian performative 'lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense' (2005: 5). In attempting to articulate a sense of community beside difference, however, her description assumes a collective, universal transcendence: an essentialised truth. During performance she may *feel* that this is the case, but is that really akin to *knowing* the truth(s) of that experience? It is this difference – between the truth and *truth(s)* of subjectivity and its relation to politics – which I hope to make evident through the destabilising force of the queer moment.

Let us consider feminist theorist Angelika Bammer's definition of utopia, cited by Dolan (2005: 7):

My goal is to replace the idea of 'a utopia' as something fixed. A form to be fleshed out, with the idea of 'the utopian' as an *approach towards*, a movement beyond set limits into the realm of the not-yet-set. At the same time, I want to counter the notion of the utopian as unreal with the proposition that the utopian is powerfully real in the sense that hope and desire (and even fantasies) are real, never 'merely' fantasy. It is a force that moves and shapes history.

(Bammer, 1991: 7)

Here utopia becomes a process. From this perspective, I will propose that queer moments emerge as part of a process within the politics of subjectivity. Their utopian dimensions exist intensely within the moment but cannot be reproduced as a constant state; what endures is their radical potential to 'energise' that process. Queer moments, therefore, play their part in the present movement to engage with theatre and performance through 'ecology' (Kershaw, 2007). To produce an exceptionally basic formulation: nothing in ecological systems happens without energy exchange and thus energy exchange is foundational to performance. Queer moments are an intense part of this exchange where ghosts can momentarily produce utopian processes and death gives birth to life.

Performance Ontology

The danger here, of course, is that in talking of 'energy', 'ghosts' and 'utopia' I am merely reproducing the critically deficient metaphors and vague analytical tropes highlighted above. Auslander warns against such practice:

I quickly became impatient with what I consider to be traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of 'liveness' than invoking clichés and mystifications like 'the magic of live theatre', the 'energy' that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event, and the 'community' that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectators.

(2008: 2)

In *Liveness* (2008) he provides an articulate and convincing attack against Peggy Phelan's valorisation of live performance's unique ontology: it can only live in the present, it cannot be saved, it avoids the economy of repetition and remains ontologically independent – linguistically, economically and technologically – from mass reproduction. He argues that to claim an ontology of liveness is nonsensical, as performance cannot exist on the 'outside' of the ideologies of capital and reproduction that define a mediatised culture. As 'liveness' can only be visible through the possibility of technical reproduction it will always already be defined in relation to that cultural regime: the live can exist only *through* an economy of reproduction. Rhetorically, Auslander's critique seems to be well-founded.

He continues the attack through pointing to a similarity between one of the themes of Phelan's *Mourning Sex* (1997) and performance theorist Herbert Blau's claim that 'it is the actor's mortality which is the actual subject [of any performance], for he is right there dying in front of your eyes' (Blau, 1982: 34). In that book she proposes that 'live performance and theatre ("art with real bodies") persist despite an economy of reproduction that makes them seem illogical and certainly a poor investment ... it may well be that theatre and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially death' (1997: 3).

Auslander offers a counter-argument to these claims examining how pre-programmed 'chatterbots' have been used in performative experiments and seemingly respond in the 'live moment':

Chatterbots typically operate in text-based digital environments, in which the user types messages to the bot and the bot responds in “typed” words that appear on the computer screen. Chatterbots are based on research in natural language processing and are generally programmed to recognize words and word patterns and to respond with statements that make sense in the context of what is said to them, though some are also capable of initiating conversations.

(2007: 528)

Though he concedes that robots cannot address the theme of mortality articulated by Blau and Phelan in the same way as human performers, he takes issue with the fact that both performance theorists privilege live performance on the basis of the mortal ‘liveness’ of the human performer (2007: 530-531). For Auslander the chatterbot undermines ‘the idea that live performance is a specifically human activity; it subverts the centrality of the live, organic presence of human beings to the experience of live performance; and it casts into doubt the existential significance attributed to live performance’ (2007: 531).

Dolan however, though conceding that the mediatised/live binary does not exist, also puts forward her case for the uniqueness of ‘liveness’ in response to Auslander.

Unfortunately, her argument depends on uncritical assumptions about community and clichéd appeals to ‘belief’, which do nothing but reinforce Auslander’s claims:

I must admit I *believe* in all the things that Auslander disparages ...
I've experienced them all. I've felt the magic of theatre; I've been
moved by the palpable energy that performances that work
generate; and I've witnessed the potential of the temporary
communities formed when groups of people gather to see other
people labor in present, continuous time, time in which something
can always go wrong.

(Dolan, 2005: 40)

Despite these serious shortcomings in her argument, this thesis seeks to find a critical language to support Dolan's statement that 'liveness promotes a necessary and moving confrontation with mortality ... we're dying together' (2005: 14). Queer moments, for me, offer a new perspective on 'liveness' without recourse to systems of belief, so that terms such as 'energy', 'ghosts' and 'utopia' might become critically inflected reference points when considering performance. This position depends on reconfiguring an alternative view of performance ontology, which is currently not accommodated by the dualistic tensions present in the Auslander/Phelan debate.

Performance as Production

To make my point clear: I cannot argue with Auslander's criticism of Phelan's perspective on performance ontology; however, this thesis celebrates the political possibilities that the live encounter – between living bodies occupying a single space – might encourage. That is not because I believe live performance possesses the unique ontology proposed by Phelan; when, for example, she argues that 'without

copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a manically charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control’ (1993: 148), hence performance ‘leaves no visible trace afterwards’ (1996: 149). From a visual perspective, it is perhaps hard to disagree with these claims: the ephemerality of performance means that any documentation (e.g. written or recorded) of the process will inevitably alter its form; performance, after the event, can no longer be ‘visible’ in the same way. Though I am inspired by her rigorous investigation into the politics of human subjectivity and its relation to performance, where I part company with Phelan, however, is in her insistence that ‘performance *in a strict ontological sense* is nonreproductive’ (1996: 148). Surely there is more to performance than the ‘visible’? I will argue that ‘queer moments’ can be characterised as experiences that *produce* embodied transformative traces that survive the ephemeral event. In which case, if one can convincingly argue for the productive potential of performance from such a contradictory perspective, then to talk in terms of a ‘strict ontology’ becomes nonsensical. Any such ontological claims about performance should pay heed to its often contradictory and multiple ‘nature’.

In fact, some of Phelan’s more recent work could be seen as working against her original statement about the nonreproductive ontology of performance. In her essay ‘Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows’, she discusses Abramović’s 2002 New York installation ‘The House with the Ocean View’, during which the artist inhabited three raised ‘rooms’ in a gallery space over a period of twelve days. Her analysis suggests that because ‘the face-to face encounter is the most crucial arena in which the ethical

bond we share becomes manifest, then live theatre and performance might speak to philosophy with renewed vigour' (2004: 577).

For Nick Ridout, Phelan's essay:

Is concerned with the potentially transformative consequence of the personal encounter ... that brings a fresh awareness of the vulnerability of the human body alongside a revived understanding of the way in which the relationships between us might preserve us all from that to which we are vulnerable, such as pain, distress and death.

(2009: 60)

Although such analysis may be grounded in the 'present' and 'presence' of the inter-relationship between the performer and spectator, it also 'moves beyond that immediate situation' through an ethical 'reawakening' (2009: 61). Might such transformative encounters, which continue to resonate *after* the event, imply the productive potentials of performance? Does such 'productivity' offer a contradiction, which flies in the 'face' of Phelan's position on the non-reproductive ontological nature of performance?

In attempting to specify an ontology of performance, Phelan brackets 'performance' as a separate 'being' (1993: 146), which can be analysed for its individual characteristics. But if live performance, as I account for it, involves living bodies

sharing the same space, then performance exists inter-relationally between subjects; one cannot separate its ontology from the way it produces knowledge between those subjects as part of a potentially profound exchange, which may continue beyond the duration of performance. For me, what characterises this epistemology of performance – the way knowledge(s) are produced – is multiplicity and simultaneity. That is because live performance affords multiple versions, of the same spatio-temporal moment, which potentially produces the differences and contradictions necessary to generate paradoxes. Such paradoxes are what might produce queer moments.

Paradoxes offer a challenge to dualistic thought. Perhaps, therefore, when confronted with performative paradoxes, all the spectator can do is *go with the moment*. Such moments offer a different knowledge of experience than that which is usually afforded by the dualisms of language and representation. This is why Auslander's critique of Phelan is somewhat of a red herring when it comes to engaging with the political potentials of live performance; the focus on ontology distracts from the way the epistemologies of live performance might be produced through paradoxes which give queer moments their force. I will not be making a case for privileging the live over the mediated; although I will attempt to privilege the truth(s) that the paradoxes of live encounters have to offer the 'politics of performance'. My thesis aims to demonstrate this point, not only through its content but also through its structure and the ways in which it is written.

Structure

When I witnessed it in 2002, *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* had a profound impact on me. I also had a sense that ‘queer theory’, which I had encountered as an undergraduate, might be useful in illuminating this effect, but also that it was potentially limited in some respects: if performance is always already caught within the hierarchical dualisms of language and representation, how can it account for ‘queer’ moments that are felt to transcend them? How might linguistic deconstruction alone account for the embodied *production* of the queer moment? I had a suspicion that a solely deconstructive approach, as has been associated with queer theory, would fall short of an adequate response to performance in this respect.

Therefore, following my introduction to the theoretical implications of the thesis in Chapter 1, the subsequent chapters attempt to test the limits of such ‘theory’ against a series of case studies. My methods of presentation therefore gradually adapt in responding to the ‘nature’ of the practices I discuss. For this reason, a diverse cross-section of performances are explored, including shows by transgendered performance artist Lazlo Pearlman, live art practitioner Franko B, the controversial production *XXX* by Spanish company Fura dels Baus, a Welsh-language adaptation of Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on her Life* by Sherman Cymru and, of course, *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*. Hence part of my argument is that queer moments have the potential to emerge across a wide-range of performance environments. These case studies provide a progression towards the final chapter where I aim to

put their discoveries into writing practice in order to *translate* the profound moment I experienced in *Such Stuff*.

This approach inevitably produces exclusions, especially because I place my own corporeal body as a pivot to the analysis. The fact that I am a gay, Welsh-speaking, theatre practitioner who studied English literature at the University of Edinburgh before attending a physical theatre school with Lazlo Pearlman obviously has influenced my choices. In *Staging Femininities* Geraldine Harris argues that the performance scholar's selection of material will never be innocent; always it will be predicated on the desires and exclusions produced by their subjective positions (1999: 19). However, because performance offers both simultaneity and multiplicity, it is important to make evident how it resists 'attempts at authoritative, interpretative "mastery" and cannot ultimately be appropriated to single "pure" uncontradictory theoretical positions' (Harris, 1999: 21). Therefore, though these are my personal selections, their analysis should indicate the possibility that queer moments may also be produced in performance environments that are not directly considered here.

Exploring such issues of multiplicity in an attempt to produce a more 'visceral reading' of performance led me in several directions, promiscuously encountering a combination of relevant disciplines and inter-disciplines. For example: phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006; Hammond et al, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 2002), theatre phenomenology (States, 1985; Raynor, 2006) and even neo-Darwinism (Dawkins, 1999). My attempts to grapple with embodied experience also led me to

other theorists who have wrestled with desire: Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Freud (1991), Lacan (1977), Lyotard (2004) and Kristeva (1982). Not all of these encounters emerged as equally fruitful theoretical sources. Because Butler's work, as I shall show in Chapter 1, provided a consistent and rich theoretical perspective, neo-Darwinism, for example, was no longer appropriate to my analysis. Also, phenomenology became an influence on how I attempt to 'write' the experience of performance, rather than a discipline that structures the argument.

This thesis presents a journey from a queer theoretical approach to a queer phenomenological practice, from exercises in 'reading' performance to a performative writing experiment. Its trajectory visits the following topics: 'reading', 'feeling', 'desire', 'politics', 'ethics' and 'performative writing'. In addition to these thematic interests, it might also be useful to consider the thesis structure as reflecting a 'Butlerian trajectory'. In Butler's work it is possible to trace a series of concerns which move from 'gender', to the 'body', to 'politics', to 'ethics' and finally to the 'non/human'. It would be wrong, however, as Chapter 1 will demonstrate, to suggest that Butler develops these themes in sequential, linear progression through her books: all of these topics are present across her work, but they emerge in sharper focus through this terminological sequence as her writing evolves. Similarly, in response to this, Chapter 2 primarily focuses on 'gender performativity', Chapter 3 on the 'body', Chapter 4 on 'politics', Chapter 5 on 'ethics' and, finally, Chapter 6 considers the queer concept of the 'non/human' as that is a primary concern in Butler's most recent work, especially *Frames of Recognition* (2009). Each analysis of performance aims to offer fresh insights in preparation for the final attempt to

communicate through writing – to *translate* – the profound and political impact of what I experienced in *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*. Every chapter aims to lead the reader, reiteratively, into the final performative writing experiment.

‘Writing’ Performance

This experiment can be seen as a response to the following question asked by Dolan:

‘how do we write about our own spectatorship in nuanced ways that capture the complicated emotions that the best theater experiences solicit?’ (Dolan, 2005: 8). It is a difficulty also acknowledged by Aston and Harris:

Attempts we made to convey or analyse our experiences ‘in the moment’ either ended in description too detailed to contain in one volume or sent us spinning off further and further from the actual practice into philosophical speculations that potentially embrace the fields of phenomenology, psychology, or neuro-science.

(2008:14)

These, they argue, are the challenges that accompany the ‘terrain of embodiment’, which is ‘so impossibly difficult to communicate retrospectively in writing’ (2008: 183).

The ‘performative’ element of my writing in the final chapter is part of the way I attempt to respond to this ‘impossible difficulty’. As Peggy Phelan argues, recalling Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s questioning of the language of philosophy in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968: 102-103):

Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for 'what philosophy wishes all the same to say.' Rather than describing the performance event in 'direct signification', a task I believe to be impossible and not terrifically interesting, I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality made vivid by the psychic process of distortion (repression, fantasy, and the general hubbub of the individual and collective unconscious), and made narrow by the muscular force of political repression in all its mutative violence.

(1997: 11-12)

I am interested in whether my final chapter can 'enact the affective force' of the queer moment for the reader and thus indicate something of the 'muscular force of political repression'.

This performative impulse is, not surprisingly, reflected in Butler's writing. In *Subjects of Desire*, Butler describes the prose style of Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Hegel's sentences *enact* the meanings that they convey; indeed, they show that what 'is' only is to the extent that is *enacted*. Hegelian sentences are read with difficulty, for their meaning is not immediately given or known... Like a line of poetry that stops

us and forces us to consider that the *way* in which it is said is essential to *what* it is saying.

(cited in Salih, 2002: 13)

Butler's own style of writing also exemplifies performativity. As Salih argues, 'it would make little sense for her to theorize the incoherent, incomplete, unstable subject in sentences that present themselves as lucid, finished and epistemologically "solid"' (Salih, 2002: 145). Butler's approach is effectively a *political* strategy, which provokes new ways of looking at a familiar world through the 'painfulness of "passing through" difficult language' (Salih, 2002: 147). For Salih, this means that 'becoming a critical intellectual involves working hard on difficult texts that demand attention, concentration and possibly "translation" on the part of the reader' (Salih, 2002: 147).

Though perhaps true in practice, there is something rather miserable and elitist about Salih's comment. I would like to imagine that 'enactment' through writing could be produced in other ways aside from academic and linguistic 'difficulty': language can sing as well as groan. So as this thesis 'passes through' explorations of the unstable subject, challenges the solidity of materiality, investigates political and ethical strategies, valorises acts of translation in its attempts to reveal the profound and political implications of queer moments, the process hopefully may become as light-hearted as it was exacting.

Chapters

The success of this 'experiment' is fraught with fragility: it may or may not work for any particular reader. The challenge lies in attempting to demonstrate that queer moments exist whilst maintaining that they are impossible to fix because performance is always in process: as soon as queer moments emerge they evaporate. Nevertheless, I wish to attempt the challenge: to invite you the reader on a journey, to engage with the text in such a way, that if it works, you might get a sense of the queer moment I experienced.

Of course, to suggest that the experiment might not work provides an immediate disclaimer, which smacks of a quasi-religious plea, an unjustified leap of faith: how can you prove it *does not* exist? To avoid any accusations of wish-fulfilment, the theoretical framework provided throughout, but especially in the Chapter 1, allows an alternative engagement with what I attempt to capture performatively in the final chapter. Hopefully this means that, even if the reader does not fully sense the queer moment as I experienced it, there is still the possibility that they might have a theoretical foundation for understanding those experienced by 'themselves' in practice. From these perspectives, this thesis is offered both as a theoretical and a practical guide: implying that queer moments have 'something to say' to both the theory and practice of performance.

For this reason, readers more interested in the performative experiment rather than the theoretical context might at first skip Chapter 1 and go straight to the case studies. If the experiment fails, they might then return to Chapter 1 for guidance. In

fact, in an earlier draft of this thesis, much of the information and argument in this chapter was omitted in an attempt to arrive quickly at the performative moment through avoiding the deferral of theory. Hopefully this revised structure accommodates both interests – theory and practice – more fully.

Here is a brief summary of the chapters' contents. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the experiment that follows. It offers a theoretical context for 'queerness' through investigating the history and ideas of 'queer theory', paying particular attention to the work of Judith Butler. Furthermore, it explores and defines the key concepts of the thesis, including 'politics of performance', 'materiality', 'desire', 'ethics' and 'profundity'. The work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is also introduced, refracted through Butler's writing, as a foundation for understanding how queer moments might emerge in practice. Finally, the term 'queer moment' itself is defined in greater detail.

Chapter 2 offers a detailed analysis – a 'queer reading' – of *He Was A Sailor, The Sea Was Inside Him (sometimes there were storms)*, a self-nominated queer performance staged by transgendered performance artist Lazlo Pearlman at the Drill Hall, London, in 2007. The chapter explores how Lazlo's body performs a powerful paradox that may produce the ghost of a queer subject.

Chapter 3 questions how such 'ghosts' might not only be 'read', but also be experienced and felt to generate a profound affect on the spectator. It investigates a variety of performances by live artist Franko B, including *I'm Not Your Babe* (1997), *I*

Miss You (2003) and *Aktion 893 (Why Are You Here?)* (2005). The chapter introduces a notion of 'radical intimacy' between performer and spectator, a condition which destabilises the dualistic tension of the subject/other relationship and which potentially produces queer moments.

Chapter 4 attempts a phenomenologically queer reading through a more viscerally inflected approach to analysis, asking how desire can challenge performance environments? Through engaging a performance of *XXX* (2003) by the Spanish theatre company La Fura Dels Baus, it argues that the group's apparent inability to deconstruct its own representations *and* circuits of desire severely compromised the production's political, ethical and 'queer' potential, so that it risked subjugating its performers and spectators in an ethically dubious orgy of power and pleasure. This chapter focuses more fully on the politics of performance and approaches the performativity of ethics. I will explore how performance might encourage us to 'see feelingly' through investigating Butler's notion of a 'common human vulnerability'.

Chapter 5 aims to integrate two contrasting approaches to a single play: a close reading of the text of Martin Crimp's *Attempts On Her Life* (2007) and an analysis of the play in performance in a Welsh-language translation by Owain Martell – *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* – produced by Sherman Cymru, Cardiff (2009). Guided by Butler's account of Levinas' concept of 'the face' as a foundation for ethics, I argue that the way Crimp exploits mediatised images implies that certain 'frames of recognition' (Butler, 2009: 6) potentially limit the reader's/spectator's potential to 'see feelingly'. If this is the case, such uses might indicate how encounters between live bodies, as opposed

to mediated ones, are *more likely* to produce sources for an investigation into human ethics. In this chapter the English playscript and Welsh-language production allow me to propose 'translation' as a key ethical process, which performance might usefully explore. Performances that encourage translational processes, which negotiate the 'meaning' of contingently essentialised subject positions – such as 'man', 'woman', 'gay', 'straight' – are more likely to produce queer moments.

Finally, Chapter 6 attempts to put all of these factors considerations into performative writing practice. It aims to translate a series of profound moments that I experienced in *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* (2002) and relate them to a political agenda. How was the body in performance negotiated to produce a ghost of the queer subject? How was radical intimacy achieved between subject/other? How did the performance deconstruct its representations and interrupt its circuits of desire to encourage the spectator to see feelingly? How did it rehearse acts of translation between the variety of perspectives the performance had to offer and thus provide a 'model' for queer theory's relation to an embodied politics? And finally, how and why were these queer moments profound and political?

Because these moments emerged between the limits of language/representation and the excesses of desire, translating the conditions that led to them will inevitably betray them. However, with reference to theorists who have attempted to find a language to write about desire, this final chapter stages an experiment that seeks to replicate how the conditions of performance interrupted both its system of representation and its circuits of desire. Drawing on Butler's work, in combination

with Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird's *Queering the Non/Human* (2008), I argue that what emerges as a result of these conditions is a radical intimacy that produces the paradox of the 'non/human' through the synaesthesia of sight, sound and touch. These processes disrupted the ontological category of the human itself; they fleetingly produced the Levinasian face with its sense of common human vulnerability, despite the dualisms of language and representation which differentiate subject/other. I suggest this moment produced an 'excess of truth(s)', which was viscerally embodied. Such were the queer traces that – for me – survive the ephemeral event in a profound way. This thesis might thus become one measure of their political effect as an ongoing process of cultural translation between the 'theory' of Chapter 1 and the 'practice' of Chapter 6. It therefore may offer a further encounter in a tripartite process which continues to perform, as between a) artists-in-action and solo researcher, (b) solo researcher and performance traces; (c) researcher/traces and thesis readers.

Footnotes/Endnotes

This thesis makes use of both footnotes and endnotes to each chapter: there are both practical and 'performative' reasons for this. My footnotes combine three 'types' of notes, all of them technical. These include explanations of terms, pointers to further relevant references/discussions, and 'deferrals' which lead the reader to other parts of the thesis where the topics/terms mentioned are discussed in greater detail. Such footnotes have already been utilised in this introduction.

The endnotes also consist of three main 'types' but they are explicatory rather than technical and are often longer than the footnotes. These include scholarly asides, personal biography and historical accounts. Each endnote will be marked thematically ('aside', 'personal' or 'history') within the text so that the reader might choose whether or not to leave the page, depending on their particular interest in the subject. These alternative perspectives are intended to reinforce the theme of performance multiplicity, which, as this Introduction has demonstrated, is a key theme of this thesis.

Chapter 1

Queerness: paradox, politics, profundity

Introduction

As noted in the Introduction, the topics of this thesis – queerness, profundity and politics and their relationship to performance – are substantive and often complex subjects. For example, they demand an investigation into the academic field of queer theory; a focus on embodied traces and their relationship to profundity suggests an exploration of the difficult question of materiality and how we might analyse the often-fraught relationship of the material body, not only to performance, but also to queer theory itself. Any analysis of bodies in live performance must also consider the question of desire (another slippery term which can easily elude definition). Simultaneously, the relationship of live bodies in space might also lead us to ‘politics’, if we approach their dynamic from the perspective of relations of power. This chapter will aim to offer a thorough investigation of these subjects: ‘queer theory’, ‘performance’, ‘politics’, ‘materiality’ and ‘desire’. Through exploring a variety of relevant writings and theories I will define this thesis’s key terms and concepts and the parameters of its theoretical context.

Queer Theory

In *Foucault and Queer Theory* (2000) Tamsin Spargo suggests that ‘queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and

sexual desire' (2002: 9). By now there are multiple texts, which attempt to sketch out the genealogy of queer theory¹. These texts engage with theorists working in a variety of disciplines, such as anthropology (Rubin, 1984); cultural materialism² (Dollimore, 1991; Sinfield, 1994a, 1994b, 1998, 1999); French feminism (Beauvoir, 1968; Moi, 1985)³; history (Foucault, 1976; D'Emillio, 1992) and psychoanalysis and film theory (de Lauretis, 1991).

In the *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (2009) suggest that the earliest queer theoretical works are represented by the following texts: *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990); *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick, 1993); *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Doty, 1993), *Homographesis*

¹ These include *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Tuner, 2000); *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Warner, 1993); *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Spargo, 2000); *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Sullivan, 2003); *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Corber and Valocchi, 2003), and most recently, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory* (Giffney and O'Rourke, 2009). The latter states that it provides 'an up-to-the-minute snapshot of queer scholarship from the past two decades, identifies many current directions queer theorising is taking, while also signposting several fruitful avenues for future research' (2009: 3-4).

² In *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading*, Alan Sinfield explains the principals of cultural materialism:

Culture is political. That is the key axiom of *cultural materialism* – Raymond Williams's term for analytic work which sees texts as inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history; as involved, necessarily, in the making of meanings which are always, finally, political meanings.

(1994b: viiii)

From this angle, both Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore's work (Dollimore, 1991) investigates the political potential of, what they call, 'sexual dissidence', in much the same way as 'queer' functions for many queer theorists.

³ I use the term 'French feminism' broadly here. It is intended to include a variety of French feminist theorists working in the latter part of the twentieth century. These might include Simone de Beauvoir whose now often-quoted dictum from *The Second Sex* of 'One is not born but becomes a woman' carries with it the force of queer gender performativity. Other theorists might include Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose body of work have resonances with queer theory and are often referred to in later 'queer' writings. Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985) offers a short but comprehensive introduction to their work.

(Edelman: 1994), *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Warner, 1993); *Inside/Out* (Fuss, 1991) and *Saint Foucault* (Halperin, 1995). These books cover a variety of disciplines: philosophy, literary criticism, film studies, literary and cultural analysis, sociology, psychology and history respectively.

Of course, this is by no means an exhaustive list, but it seeks to indicate the scope of queer theory's multi-disciplinary breadth. Furthermore many of these academics also engage, deploy and critique the ideas and theories developed in the broader fields of feminism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism⁴, all of which, as Sarah Salih argues, 'facilitated and informed the ongoing investigation into the category of the subject' (Salih, 2002: 8). Queer theory thus arose from an often-uneasy debate between these multiple perspectives. In fact, as Michael Warner argues, queer theory's literature can be sketched so broadly that it is arguably a 'place of convergence of much modern thought' (Warner, 1993: viii). Possessing such promiscuity, it might be considered as a school of thought 'with a highly unorthodox view of discipline' (Spargo, 2000: 9): an anti-discipline perhaps⁵. My first methodological challenge in investigating the notion of a 'queer moment' was

⁴ Poststructuralism, like queer theory, is difficult to identify with any school of thought. It might usefully be considered, however, as having emerged as an idea after Jacques Derrida presented his paper 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' as part of 'The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man' conference at Johns Hopkins University in 1966. In the discussion that followed, Derrida described his method of 'deconstruction' – which I will return to later – as a 'criticism of structuralism' (Macey, 2000: 309).

⁵ This is a borrowed term which was first used at the founding conference of Performance Studies International in New York, 1995: 'In plenary presentations, Richard Schechner argued performance studies was an "in-between", interdisciplinary "field" while Dwight Conquergood pungently called it an "anti-discipline"' (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011: 3).

identifying not only how the term might be defined, but which and whose 'queer theory' would be most useful to illuminate its meanings.

Queer theorists might be considered as those who are generally 'interested in non-normative forms of identity, or forms in which sex, gender, and sexuality do not line up in the socially prescribed way' (Corber and Valocchi, 2003: 1). This does not necessarily mean that they *identify* themselves as queer theorists; indeed many of those in the list mentioned above were only later recognised as contributors to the 'discipline' of queer. The following section outlines a brief history of queer theory in order to identify which texts might be most useful to this thesis. Which queer scholarship on non-normative genders and sexualities might help formulate a 'politics of performance'?

A 'Genealogy' of Queer Theory

One of the key methodologies to influence queer theory was Michel Foucault's characterisation of 'genealogical' inquiry⁶. In the *History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault argued that the 'homosexual as a species' (1976: 43) had emerged as a historical product of the Victorian period⁷. Adopting this approach for her own theorisation of

⁶ The following definition of genealogy is offered in *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*:

A mode of historical inquiry adopted by Foucault from 1971 onwards and derived from the *wirkliche Historie* ('effective' or 'critical history') invoked in the second of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*; Foucault's choice of terminology also makes an obvious allusion to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, in which it is argued that the actual causes of a thing's origins and its eventual uses are worlds apart.

(Macey, 2001: 157)

⁷ For additional 'queer' historical approaches, which investigate the historical contingency of the homosexual subject cf. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (Halperin, 1990); *Impersonations* (Orgel, 1996) and *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (D'Emilio, 1992).

gender, Judith Butler identifies genealogy as investigating 'the political stakes in designating as origin and cause, those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (1990: xxxii). Tamsin Spargo suggests that Butler's definition interprets genealogy as 'tracing the installation and operation of false universals' (2000: 73).

If queer theory refuses a teleological explanation of subjectivity then attempting to sketch a causal history of queer scholarship seems especially problematic. Aware of this, Nicky Sullivan makes a distinction between proposing an essentialised definition of queerness through a historical approach and exploring the *variety* of histories that have led to its emergence as an academic discipline:

Obviously Queer Theory does function in specific – albeit complex and somewhat ambiguous – ways in particular, and in relation to particular issues. And, as Alan McKee has pointed out, ignoring this because of a fear that any attempt to investigate the multifarious, multivalent, and contextually specific practices(s) of Queer Theory will result in assimilation, is politically dangerous and ethically suspect. Historically, says McKee, Queer Theory has been inscribed in a number of ways, and 'to write histories of Queer Theories is not the same thing as defining Queer theory' (McKee, 1999: 237).

(1999: 27)

Although the historical narrative presented below will attempt to trace a trajectory that has led to the establishing of 'queer theory' as an academic discipline, I am aware that there are always other competing 'histories' that will have contributed to its formationⁱ (*aside*). Sketching such a history, however, is necessary to my argument for two reasons. Firstly, to identify which particular branch of queer scholarship is most useful for investigating the 'queer moment', and to discover how precisely the term 'queer' is useful to our understanding of the political scope of that moment.

Following the publication of *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler has often been considered as 'the creator of modern queer theory' (Gauntlett, 2002: 134). Her 'gender performativity' thesis, first articulated in this book, has had a major influence not just in queer theory, but also across a variety of disciplinesⁱⁱ (*aside*): 'Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990: 43-44). Performativity and its complex relation to performance, as well as the way its definition continues to evolve throughout Butler's work, will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. For now, it might usefully be considered as the operations – historically and culturally contingent material practices – that regulate and constitute the normative appearance of gender. That is to say, as a result of performativity, 'masculine' and 'feminine' genders have emerged as the 'normal' articulation of 'male' and 'female' sexuality respectively. So for Butler, though sex is not the biological foundation of gender, performativity works to disguise that fact through naturalising 'the binary

organization of gender by functioning as the seemingly neutral referent of gendered identity' (Corber and Valocchi, 2003: 8). This process has contributed to what Butler calls 'heteronormativity', a contemporary Western sexual-gender system which views heterosexual relations as the *norm* and all other forms of sexual practices as deviations from the norm.

At first, even Butler herself questioned the relation of her earlier work to queer theory. In an interview in 1993 she confessed: 'all I knew was that Teresa de Lauretis had published an issue of the journal *Differences* called "Queer Theory". I thought it was something she had put together. It never occurred to me that I was part of queer theory' (Websites: Osborne and Segal). De Lauretis had coined the term in 1990 for the title of a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz, that aimed to produce:

A double emphasis – on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own [lesbian and gay] discourses and their constructed silences.

(de Lauretis, 1991: iv)

'Queer theory' was thus proposed as a critical intervention that would interrogate how discourse – a historical and culturally contingent practice that produces certain power relations such as those expressed through heteronormativity – inevitably produces hierarchical dualisms and exclusions. Put simply, even in the seemingly

progressive world of gay liberation, whom does the term 'gay' exclude? One of the ideas proposed by my interrogation of queer theory from a performative perspective can be summarised by David Halperin's provocative definition of queer as 'an identity without an essence' (Halperin, 1995: 92)⁸.

By the time that *Bodies That Matter* (1993) was published the affiliation between Butler's work and queer theory had been sedimented, an irony if we consider the book as an intervention into the 'sedimentation' of sex and gender through performativity. Its final chapter – 'Critically Queer' – invoked the deconstructive power of the term 'queer' for anti-homophobic politics: "'Queer" derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult' (Butler, 1993: 226). Butler had become part of an increasingly expanding field of queer theory which continued to delegitimise 'heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them' (Corber and Valocchi, 2003: vi).

Of course, such thinking did not evolve in a vacuum. Butler borrowed her term 'performativity' from the British philosopher J.L Austin's speech act theory, which argues that certain utterances in ceremonial practices exercise a binding power through their performance, for example, marriage ceremonies or legal sentencing (Austin, 1975). As noted above, her genealogical approach was also inspired by Foucault, who had already argued that the subject is constituted by the normative

⁸ For further discussion of the relationship between queer theory and Butler cf. Samuel A. Chambers and Terrel Carver's *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (2008).

structures that circulate in society: the ‘homosexual was both product of agents of social control and the social actors who “reversed” its deployment by mobilizing politically around it’ (Corber and Valocchi, 2003: 11)⁹. Additionally, Butler’s theorisation of heteronormativity had been pre-empted by the notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, coined by the poet, essayist and feminist Adrienne Rich in her 1981 essay entitled ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ (1993). Furthermore, Butler’s theory of performativity echoes anthropologist Gayle S. Rubin’s notion of ‘sexual essentialism’, defined in her influential essay ‘Thinking Sex’, written in 1984, as ‘the idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institution’ (1993: 3). Though the influence of what Butler saw through her ‘queer lens’ cannot be underestimated, the contours of that queer lens itself had emerged through a combination of influencesⁱⁱⁱ (*aside*). My ‘sources’ for queer theory, which could usefully be employed to explore queer moments, were expanding: there are no ‘normative’ sources for queer theory or queer studies^{iv} (*history*). So how might I best focus my search?

A Focus On What Butler Saw

Earlier critics of queer theory (Jeffreys, 1994; Edwards, 1998; Nussbaum, 1999) argued that the deconstructive method employed by queer theorists meant that such analysis remained merely at the level of discourse: queer theory’s approach was nothing more than textual word-games¹⁰. If gender and sexuality are not

⁹ The specifically ‘political’ implications of queer theory and its relation to the politics of performance will be considered in detail later in this chapter.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion and analysis, c.f. Tim Edwards and Martha Nussbaum’s criticisms of queer theory cf. *Media, Gender and Identity* (Gauntlett, 2002: 143-151). For Sheila Jeffrey’s, cf. Nora Giffney’s review of *Unpacking Queer Politics* (2003) in *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 6. No 3.

considered from the perspective of an institutionalised social practice, and dissociated from an embodied reality, then such considerations become politically redundant. Subsequently these critics could not see how such 'theory' offered any grounds for gay/feminist politics because it viewed 'materiality' as a product of discourse¹¹. Just as Foucault had announced that 'there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary' (Foucault, 1976: 95-6), so queer theory was here viewed as apolitical. With this in mind, if queer theoretical perspectives are intellectually concerned with language, where does this leave the 'materiality' of performance? How can 'queer theory' provide a viable framework for the investigation of 'embodied moments' and a foundation for 'material' practice?

The terms of such feminist/gay vs. queer debates have been well rehearsed and often produced a form of theoretical paralysis as queer theory was aligned along an axis of social-constructionism and feminism and gay studies accused of sexual essentialism; that is to say, a theoretical stand off between, on the one hand, a conviction that subjects are historically and socially contingent, produced in the linguistic system through which they emerged, and, on the other hand, a belief in the essentialised 'female' or 'gay' subject as a foundation for politics^v (*aside*).

¹¹ 'Materiality' is a complex word and demands a nuanced approach to its meaning due to its variable connotations in relation to the 'material' body in both politics and performance cf. 'Materiality' section below.

In their introduction to *Feminist Futures?* (2006), Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris point out that Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993) explicitly portrays a commitment to the material category of 'woman' as a foundation for politics:

That the term [woman] is questionable does not mean that we ought not to use it, but neither does the necessity to use it mean that we ought not perpetually to interrogate the exclusions by which it proceeds, and to do this precisely in order to learn how to live the contingency of the political signifier in a culture of democratic contestation.

(1993: 222)

Butler reinstates the category of sex as a political necessity in a world primarily constructed through linguistic dualisms because, in any body-based politics, 'contingent essentialism' can provide the provisional foundation for the type of critical double edged-thinking that Butler calls for; that is, a continual interrogation of what is excluded and marginalised by the categories through which such politics are conducted¹².

¹² For a further discussion of 'contingent essentialism' cf. Chapter 2. This notion will also be developed more fully in Chapter 4 in relation to performance. Contingent essentialism, I will argue, is politically necessary and potentially productive if submitted to an ongoing process of cultural translation. So for example, the basic categories of gender and sex might be considered as essentialised formations. These are only *provisional* foundations, however, from which new understandings of these ontological categories might be reached. Such knowledge is produced through constant acts of translation – a continual negotiation between cultural concepts – that destabilise those temporary meanings.

This is why, partially, the work of Butler gradually emerged as the branch of queer theory that would form the theoretical root(s) of my thesis. With such a proliferation of potential queer sources it became necessary to limit their parameters. Of course, other theorists have influenced and helped shape the arguments of this thesis, but in Butler's prolific works a similar non-linear thematic narrative could be inferred, which relates directly to the specific issues and territories of my argument^{vi} (*aside*). Though Butler's work is exceptionally wide reaching in scope, arguably what remains consistent is its continual re-configuration of subjectivity from the perspective of performativity. This perspective, at least potentially, lends itself more readily to the analysis of performance than other 'queer theories', which might focus more on sociology (Warner, 1993), film studies (Doty, 1993) or literature (Sedgwick, 1990), to name but a few¹³.

Furthermore, in much of her later work – *Undoing Gender* (2004), *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2009) – Butler continually attempts to articulate a position that would seem untenable to her earlier critics, which reconciles queer theory with *embodied* political practice. This concern makes her work extremely relevant to the themes of this thesis, investigating as it does the relationship between the material body in performance and the politics of practice. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), for example, she revises her earlier theories of performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) through grounding her critique in the 'material' reality of what she calls the 'new gender politics'. This term

¹³ Sedgwick also turns her attention to performativity in her later work; cf. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), which I refer to in my conclusion. It is Butler, however, who most consistently investigates the topic.

refers to a variety of contemporary movements which have emerged in recent years that are concerned with issues revolving around gender, but might also include sexuality, transgender, inter-sex, social violence and social transformation. That list is by no means exhaustive, but Butler argues that understanding the inter-relational dynamics of this new gender politics could provide the basis for new coalitional thinking, which might move queer theory into the realms of political action. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* had already argued for the necessity of an anti-homophobic inquiry for Western society (1990: 15). This concern with how queer theory might usefully be applied to a broader political picture is extended by Butler's project, where queer theory is developed to explore 'phobic violence against bodies' in general (2004: 9).

To call Butler merely a queer theorist would be exceptionally reductive. In the same vein, Sarah Salih argues neither 'poststructuralist' nor 'postmodernist'¹⁴ – the latter a label which Butler herself considers inappropriate – would suffice as 'it would elide the feminist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist frameworks within which her work is also located' (2004: 5). Butler's on-going work investigates the political and ethical issues

¹⁴ If, in philosophical terms, Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) is considered a key postmodernist text then its scepticism towards the 'grand narratives' of progress, socialism and the enlightenment shares a deconstructive impulse with queer theory as it unsettles the stability of foundational thinking. This similarity is yet again an example of how queer theory might be considered a convergence of contemporary forms of thought. Debates around postmodernism would often align themselves along similar positions as those of the early queer vs. feminist debates. That is to say, as Macey articulates: 'certain feminists object to the seeming complacency with which Lyotard announces the demise of grand narratives, pointing out that the grand narrative of *their* emancipation has by no means come to an end' (Macey, 2000: 307). However, as this chapter investigates, Butler's argument is far more nuanced than these stark oppositional stances allow. For further discussions of the logical polarity stimulated by debates surrounding post-modernism cf. *The Radical in Performance* (Kershaw, 1999: 6-8) and *The Postmodern* (Malpas, 2005).

at stake when subjects do not conform to existing grids of 'intelligibility': conditions composed of norms and practices, which have become presuppositional (Butler, 2004: 57-74). Within her investigation there is a:

concern with norms and how the terms of both existence and resistance are constrained and yet enabled by their operation; an interest in the power relations that structure contemporary reality, establishing hierarchies of viability for human life; the issue of recognition and who counts; questions of subjectivity, language and agency; and the body.

(Lloyd, 2007: 156)

Whereas the focus of her earlier books was on sex, gender, sexuality and desire, there is a noticeable shift in later work to the topic of race and the 'human' subject; hence the breadth of her queer inquiry is extended. Therefore, in addition to her analyses of performativity, it is in the dynamic, rich and varied scope of her intellectual engagements that her work lends itself so usefully to this thesis. The mobius strip narrative of her writings is refracted in the performative, political and material concerns of my investigation into the queer and profound politics of performance.

Defining Performance

This thesis offers a contribution to a long and varied investigation into the relationship between politics and performance. Qualifying such a statement demands further clarifications: firstly, what do I mean by the term 'performance'? How might we

understand 'politics' and, more specifically in the context of this thesis, 'queer politics'? What therefore is meant by a 'politics of performance' and what does queer theory have to offer such a politics? As previously mentioned, the term 'performance' is itself rather queer as it is 'contingent, contested, hard to pin down' (Bial, 2007: 1); as Marvin Carlson reminds us it 'problematizes its own categorisation' (Carlson, 2003: 2). Performance Studies¹⁵ has demonstrated that 'performance' has come to encompass so much more than the subgenres of theatre, dance, music and other performing arts, and its wider-reaching scope also includes rituals, healing, sports, popular entertainments and performance in everyday life. This latter subject is of course the main domain of queer theory and performativity^{vii} (*aside*).

The promiscuity of performance is arguably due to the fact that Western society has become increasingly 'performative'. That is to say, as Baz Kershaw argues, in cultures where democracy and capitalism meet, employers are often measured as 'players' on an economic, industrial or civil 'stage'. The 'survival' of these players inevitably depends on how well they 'perform'. Hence performance becomes the '*sine qua non* of human exchange in virtually all spheres of the social' (1999: 13)¹⁶. This is echoed by my earlier remark that Butler's performativity had become the *sine qua non* of postmodern feminism. Throughout this thesis, however, I will distinguish between

¹⁵ For an introductory discussion of the expansive breadth of performance studies cf. *Performance Studies* (Schechner, 2002).

¹⁶ For an inspiring take on such a 'general theory of performance' cf. *Perform or Else* (McKenzie, 2001). McKenzie analyses how performance has encroached upon the social efficacy, organizational efficiency and technological effectiveness of contemporary Western society. This leads him to make the bold claim that 'performance will be to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge' (McKenzie, 2001: 18).

‘performative’ as an adjective to describe performance and what I will term the ‘Butlerian performative’.

Where does this leave us, however, in terms of defining ‘performance’? Is its seeming all-inclusiveness a potential problem? For example, Erin Striff suggests:

Performance can ... be understood as being related to theatricality, a sense of otherness, of non-identical repetition, that can occur anywhere, at any time. It may consist of societal rituals, or it may be understood as the conscious and unconscious adoption of roles that we may play during everyday life, depending on the company we keep, or where we are located at the time. The theatrical metaphor is a fundamental tool we use to understand culture.

(2003: 1)

Striff’s suggestion that performance includes an ‘unconscious adoption of roles’, however, is countered by another source on ‘performance’. Marvin Carlson notes that in the *International Encyclopaedia of Communications*, ethnolinguist Richard Bauman claims that all performance involves ‘a consciousness of doubleness, through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of action’ (2003: 5). This comparison is usually inferred by an ‘external’ spectator – a theatre audience, an employer, teacher or scientist, for example – however, such double consciousness might be produced by performers themselves: ‘performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that

recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, the audience is the self' (2003: 5).

Performance as 'unconscious adoption of roles' however, as opposed to a 'double consciousness' for me signifies how Butlerian performativity often disguises the mechanisms of its operation: we are not necessarily conscious of how it functions. Queer theory works to reveal – make us conscious – of the 'invisible' socio-historical forces that produce the normative appearance of subjectivities, when in fact they are socially and historically contingent. Butler's theory of performativity, in part, is an examination of how we as human subjects might unconsciously adopt gendered roles. This thesis is interested in how 'performance' might produce such a 'double consciousness' so that a spectator might consider how subjectivities are unconsciously produced.

So for the purpose of this thesis, I make a distinction between 'performance' as environments that create reflexive structures through framing devices for their participants and unconscious performativity. In *The Radical in Performance* (1999) Kershaw identifies 'performance' as:

Cultural presentations that have recognisable theatrical components: namely, framing devices that alert the audience, spectators or participants to the reflexive structure of what is staged, drawing attention to its constructed nature, and more or less to the assumptions – social and/or political and/or cultural and/or

philosophical, etc. – through which that construction is achieved.

(1999: 15)

This offers a suitable starting point for my definition of ‘performance’; however, whereas Kershaw makes a case for examining performance which exists beyond theatre buildings as, he believes, such institutions will play a diminished role ‘in the making of a contemporary radical socio-political agenda for the future’ (1999: 20) my thesis will focus upon theatre for a paying audience, in permanent or temporarily constructed (as at the Edinburgh Festival) theatre venues. This thesis seeks to locate the potential of queerness beyond traditional ‘queer performance’^{viii} (*aside*) and to investigate the potential of queer moments as a source of radicalism within the institution of theatre¹⁷.

Of course, as Kershaw argues, the Western ‘theatre estate’ does not lend itself to producing freedoms for spectators and performers because of its institutional and spatial-architectural modes of domination and authority, and its implicit hierarchical and exclusionary value systems (1999: 55). But, as he suggests, this argument does not

¹⁷ In *The Radical in Performance* Kershaw defines ‘radical’ as:

Not just freedom *from* oppression, repression, exploitation – the resistant sense of the radical – but also freedom *to reach beyond* existing systems of formalised power, freedom to create currently unimaginable forms of association and action – the transgressive or transcendent sense of the radical. What I am interested in centrally, then, is not the ways in which radical performance might *represent* such freedoms, but rather how radical performance can actually *produce* such freedoms, or at least a sense of them, for both performers and spectators, as it is happening.

(1999: 18-19)

A touch of the radical, as defined here, is felt throughout my argument. In the second chapter, ‘radical intimacy’ emerges as a fundamental condition for queer moments. Where the queer moment differs to the radical freedom Kershaw argues for, is in its specific focus on human subjectivity and profound experience.

‘foreclose on the possibility of radicalism in the *theatre* of the future’ (1999: 20; emphasis in original). Whereas Kershaw makes a case for where radical performance is most likely to emerge, I am arguing for the conditions most likely to produce queer moments *within* the institution. We investigate performance from alternate, though complementary perspectives.

Defining Politics

Before delving into the politics of performance and their relationship to ‘queer’ it is necessary to offer a brief definition of ‘politics’ and to delineate the political context alongside which queer theory emerged. In *Theatre & Politics* (2009)^{ix} (*aside*) Joe Kelleher warns that any search for a definition of politics can lead to multiple interpretations. For example, he suggests one might consider ‘politics’ as referring to activities conducted by governments and other social institutions and organisations, or the *study* of these activities, or even more general processes concerned with the struggle over power and its distribution (2009: 2). Despite such promiscuity – a familiar theme now in writings on queerness and performance – he offers the following:

In an article titled ‘On Variousness; and on Persuasion’ (2004), Collini defines politics as the ‘important, inescapable, and difficult attempt to determine relations of power in a given space’ (2004: 67). By the phrase ‘relations of power’ we might understand that power – or powerlessness – is nothing in itself and only ever meaningful in terms of the distribution of power across social relations, among different

groups or classes or interests that make up, however momentarily, a social body. It goes without saying that this distribution of power is often unequal.

(2009: 3)

This definition and analysis are useful for this thesis due to the 'given space' of a theatrical stage and because its depiction of power as a continually contested, shifting dynamic denotes politics as an ongoing and endless process. This description therefore has much in keeping with queer theory as it echoes the vision of power articulated by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1973). If, as Foucault forcefully argued, the term homosexual was *both* the product of agents of social control and the social actors who 'reversed' the oppressive terms of its deployment, then power is indeed everywhere: it has no single source so cannot ever be overthrown, only resisted and reversed. As we will see, together with Butler's notion of performativity, such thinking developed alongside queer political activism and provided a defining context for its exploration of the relation of theory to practice.

Gay/Lesbian Politics

Many historians locate the advent of the Lesbian/Gay/Bi-sexual/Transgender/Queer [LGBTQ] visibility movement – and the 'pride' associated with that movement – with the 1969 Stonewall Inn uprising in New York City's Greenwich Village. Up until this point, gay and lesbian men who frequented the local bars around the area could expect intermittent interventions from the vice squad and subsequent arrest if they did not conform to wearing at least three articles of properly gendered clothes. On June 28th,

however, when police raided the Stonewall Inn its clientele – mostly lesbians and drag queens – fought back: they ‘refused to go obediently into the police vans waiting to cart them away for processing. Instead, with long-buried rage at the injustice of their plight, they rioted, breaking windows, throwing chairs, and otherwise resisting arrest’ (Dolan, 2009: 9). Subsequently this inspired the LGBTQ liberation movement to campaign more aggressively for equal rights and fair treatment. Here, in the UK, as a result of earlier political agitation, the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1967, partially decriminalising homosexuality through legalising sex acts in private between two consenting men who had attained the age of 21. In both the UK and the States, LGBTQ political activism, which derived its force from promoting the visibility of such subjectivities, progressively contributed towards gaining political equality.

Despite the progressive efforts of such action, Foucault’s ‘reverse hypotheses’ suggests the limitations of a politics of visibility. This is precisely the line of argument that inspires Peggy Phelan’s thesis in *Unmarked* when she claims that ‘there is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal’ (Phelan, 1993: 6)^x (*aside*). Helen Freshwater, however, criticises her valorisation of invisibility:

Not everyone has a choice about whether to remain visible or invisible, and as a consequence debates over whether the marked or unmarked position is stronger politically are rather compromised by their assumption that this is a matter of strategy. Similarly, those who

have never enjoyed the luxury of self-expression may not be so enthusiastic about silence.

(Freshwater: 2009a: 116)

Phelan herself is aware of these problems. The nuances of her argument do not seek to reinstitute invisibility as the preferred agenda of the disenfranchised but to challenge the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility:

Visibility politics have practical consequences; a line can be drawn between a practice (getting someone seen or read) and a theory (if you are seen it is harder for “them” to ignore you, to construct a punitive canon); the two can be reproductive. While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly under-represented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities. A much more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility needs to be pursued than the Left currently engages.

(1993: 6-7)

Rather than undermining the real success of visibility politics, such as the Stonewall uprising and the political influence and freedoms it gained for the LGBTQ community, Phelan’s perspective raises questions about how oppression might be produced through such freedoms. Who is excluded from such visibility? In fact, much of the political

activism operating around LGBTQ issues in the last decades of the twentieth century managed to combine aspects of a more radically 'queer' approach with the politics of visibility, offering perhaps a 'more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility' than one might at first imagine. It is here that one might find a challenge to those critics who deemed Butler's work as apolitical (Jeffreys, 1994; Edwards, 1998; Nussbaum, 1999).

'Queer' Politics

Slavoj Žižek has argued that *Gender Trouble* inspired and legitimized a 'specific *political* practice', which he calls the 'anti-identitarian turn of queer politics' (2000: 132). Sarah Salih argues that the defining context for this queer theory was the AIDS virus in the 1980s and 1990s and the homophobic reactions it prompted from advocates of 'straight culture' and a (still prevalent) belief that it was a 'gay plague'. It became crucial, she argues, to 'investigate formulations of straightness in order to reveal the 'queerness' underlying particularly those identities which aggressively present themselves as straight, straightforward, singular and stable' (Salih, 2002: 9). The activism that emerged as a result of this might be considered as 'queer politics'. On the relation of such political practice to Butler, Moya Lloyd argues that 'although Butler has observed in interviews that her association with the beginnings of queer theory and politics was unwitting ... there is no doubt that her work has been seen as central to the advent of queer politics' (2007: 10). It is useful to briefly consider Butler's relationship to such political activism before we consider her relationship the politics of performance.

ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), first emerged in New York City in 1986 to publicise and challenge the US government's funding failures with regards to AIDS

research. In January 1989 the first meeting of the London chapter of ACT UP took place and its tactics also combined direct action politics and activist glamour through a range of highly visible – from Phelan’s perspective, potentially problematic – performative interventions^{xi} (*history*). Queer Nation was founded in the USA in March 1990 by members of ACT UP. It was formed in response to national organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Human Rights Campaign, and from a belief that such groups operated through heteronormative assimilation and conformist strategies. They utilised performative tactics similar to ACT UP and were staged by gay men, lesbians and others who called themselves ‘queer’.

As Dolan suggests ‘Queer Nation, in fact, was at least partially responsible for resignifying the word “queer”, changing its connotation from a derogatory slur against gay men and lesbians into a rallying label for people across non-normative sexual definitions and practices’ (2009: 10). Rather than aiming for political ‘equality’ – claiming sameness through attempting to change governmental policies, working through courts and legislatures – their highly performative tactics worked to establish their *difference* from the norm^{xii} (*history*).

Similarly OutRage! performed Butlerian strategies of subversion through their activism. This was a British group formed in 1990 as a result of Section 28 of the Local Government Act in 1988, which legislated against the intentional promotion of homosexuality and teaching it in schools as an appropriate form of kinship. They also campaigned against further legislation and institutionalised ‘norms’ affecting lesbians and gay men that were ignored by the national government or the media. For example,

on June 12th, 1991, many LGBTQ couples performed public wedding vows at a queer mass wedding in London's Trafalgar Square^{xiii} (*history*). As Freshwater suggests, the Butlerian performative is useful for understanding the strategic subversion performed through this act. If performativity depends upon the repetition – or reiteration – of conventions of behaviour and appearance, such cultural constructions lend themselves to potential re-inscription and reinvention, offering a challenge to the normative 'rules' of sexual and gendered identity¹⁸: 'In these protests, the participants' failure to command the power of the law – to bring about the weddings and arrests their actions invoke – provides an eloquent critique of the law's shortcomings' (Freshwater: 2009a: 114)^{xiv} (*aside*).

Here Butler's work has a direct affiliation with political queer activism, a relationship that she has now come to recognise. In *Undoing Gender* she argues that the most important discovery which has emerged from queer theory for such activism is its 'claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity' (2004: 7). This statement is important because queer theory could potentially be wielded rhetorically to challenge inter-sex and transsexual subjects' desire for stable sex assignment through transformative surgery. As Judith Halberstam argues in *In a Queer Time and Place*: 'the transsexual has been used in queer theory as a symbol for the formulation of a subjectivity that actually threatens transsexual claims to legitimacy' (2005: 50). That is to say, there is a seeming contradiction in the 'queerness' of the challenge to normative gender and sexuality that transsexual subjectivity poses, and, for some, a seeming desire for an essentialised

¹⁸ Jonathan Dollimore investigates similar subversive strategies through what he calls 'transgressive reinscription', cf. *Sexual Dissidence* (1991).

stable identity¹⁹. Butler's 'queer' perspective, however, argues that it does not follow that:

Queer theory would oppose all gender assignment or cast doubt on the desires of those who wish to secure such assignments for intersex children, for instance, who may well need them to function socially even if they end up changing the assignment later in life, knowing the risks. The perfectly reasonable assumption here is that children do not need to take on the burden of being heroes for a movement without first assenting to such a role. In this sense, categorization has its place and cannot be reduced to forms of anatomical essentialism.

(2004: 7-8)

Here the focus is on the *right to transform* and 'on distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself' (2004: 8). Through these examples we might concede, as Warner argues, that 'queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear' (1993: xxviii). If Butler enables us to consider

¹⁹ For an articulate account of this 'desire' cf. Jan Morris' *Conundrum* (2002). I will also investigate this contradiction further in my analysis of Lazlo Pearlman's performance work in Chapter 2.

these relations anew, then how might her recent thinking open up new possibilities in considering the relationship between politics and performance?

Politics and Performance

Many practical/creative and academic/scholarly works have considered the relationship between politics and performance: from Bertolt Brecht's aesthetic experimentation (Willet, 1978) to lengthy studies on the politics of performance (Kershaw, 1992; 1999; Phelan, 1993; Diamond, 1996)^{xv} (*aside*). On May 6th, 2008, performance theorist Janelle Reinelt, delivering the Glynn Wickham lecture for the Society for Theatre Research at Bristol University, mused over the question 'What is political theatre today?'. Reacting to what she calls the 'post-modern shift to a notion of the radical that emphasized open-ended creative freedom but dares not (or chooses not) to speak the name 'political'' (Websites: Reinelt), her paper seeks to re-claim the 'political' in relation to theatre and performance:

I believe the word 'political' brings with it a certain concept of human relations as structures of social meaning and organization, and that these structures are ubiquitous and always present, although they are also chimerical and fluid.

(Websites: Reinelt)

Reinelt's 'ubiquitous', 'always present' yet 'fluid' depiction of political power echoes Collini's definition, noted earlier (the 'important, inescapable, and difficult attempt to determine relations of power in a given space') (2004: 67).

Fearing an association of 'politics' to corruption, impervious to ordinary human intervention, Reinelt insists that 'keeping alive in discourse the language of politics in connection to theatre and performance still seems to me something worth preserving' (Websites: Reinelt). For Reinelt there is a political modality that shapes all of our experiences. This is not the same as saying that everything is 'Political', but we might at least entertain the fact that *all* performance might be considered from a variety of perspectives along such a political modality. This means that judging a piece of work as apolitical may not be incorrect, but if the concept of political theatre were not at hand then it would be hard to discuss such a statement meaningfully.

Answering her initial question specifically, she argues that political theatre:

Is that in which artists and spectators engage with each other in a mutual effort to comprehend the situation and the structures within which we find ourselves together as a collection of people on this planet. It helps if concepts and terminology such as democracy, citizenship, representation, the juridical and institutional, pluralism, multiculturalism, censorship, and even government, are not seen to be obsolete.

(Websites: Reinelt)

The term 'political' for Reinelt, in relation to a plurality of theatrical and performance forms, is what best defines the hunger that exists within audiences for understanding and comprehending the contemporary world through aesthetic experience. In relation to theatre and performance, it wields 'the explanatory power to consider the aspects of theatre that treat our efforts as human beings to work out ways to co-exist on the planet and to set up and also transform structures and practices that make for our collective life together' (Websites: Reinelt).

Joe Kelleher, in his book *Theatre & Politics*, argues along similar lines in an exploration of the relationship between politics and theatre. His concern is how theatre can be considered *in relation to* politics; it is possible to discuss theatre from the perspective of its political dimensions without the term 'political' necessarily becoming meaningless in an overly general way, or reductive, as when it is considered only in relation to a specific genre of theatre. For Kelleher, theatre is a place where work and enjoyment are mutually dependent and politics has to do with the qualities, tensions, and implications of that dependence. Theatre does not necessarily *do* politics, but rather it can bring the attention of its participants, both actors and spectators, to 'the fact that some "thing", some familiar stranger is making an appearance here tonight and has a claim to make upon us' (2009: 15). How might such an encounter 'in this given space', to return to Collini's definition, encourage us to consider the way relations of power are organised and how such relations might become different?

It is in this confrontation with the 'stranger' – with the 'appearance, in all defiance and fragility, of the actor' (2009: 43) – between performer and spectator, that Kelleher considers performance's political potential. What does it mean to 'entertain' a stranger he asks, not merely from the perspective of enjoyment, but from how we might *hospitably* entertain one another? Does the stranger:

demand a place among 'our concerns'? And if so, how are we to answer that demand? Or else, if we understand entertainment in its other sense, do these strangers appear only to amuse us from a distance? I like to think of these dual meanings informing Brecht's statement in of what 'theatre' consists in: 'making live representations of reported or invented happenings between human beings and doing so with a view to entertainment. At any rate that is what we shall mean when we speak of theatre, whether old or new' (1978: 180).

(2009: 66)

Perhaps problematically, Kelleher's focus on how the 'demand' posed by the stranger places us in the territory of ethics, that is to say, 'how to act'²⁰, and its distinction from politics becomes muddled²¹. In fact, as we shall later see, 'politics'

²⁰ For an investigation into the relationship between this question and ethics cf. *Theatre & Ethics* (Ridout, 2009: 1-9).

²¹ Most noticeably this is because Kelleher's use of the term 'demand' immediately invokes the 'face', a concept explored by philosopher of ethics Emmanuel Levinas to articulate that which makes an ethical 'demand' on us; an imperative that is the condition for ethics. I shall be investigating ethics from this perspective later in this chapter and in further detail in Chapter 5 in relation to Martin Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* (2007).

and 'ethics' have become increasingly interchangeable in Butler's work as 'ethics displaces from politics' (Butler and Connolly, 2005: 5): an ethically inflected politics. As Moya Lloyd argues, Butler's goal is not 'to eliminate politics from ethics. It is rather, to accept that the two are continuous. Political struggles against the norm are a way of securing the possibility of ethical relations' (Lloyd, 2007: 55).

Returning the focus to queer, as well as to the political activism which challenged institutionalised heteronormativity, the 1990s also produced a vibrant tradition of queer performance (Case, 2009). In theatre and performance studies, scholars such as Sue-Ellen Case, Elin Diamond, Jill Dolan, José Esteban Muñoz^{xvi} (*aside*), Peggy Phelan, and Alan Sinfield considered how performances could work to produce and reinforce heteronormative illusions of gender and sex. Similarly, individual practitioners and theatre companies worked hard to produce performances that would reveal how both social systems and the theatre apparatus itself inculcate gender and sex norms. In this way, as Dolan argues, theatre produces rather than reflects what we consider reality by enforcing conventional notions of 'normal' (2009: 15). Just as the 'performative' strategies of groups such as Queer Nation and Outrage! engaged with the politics of heteronormativity so too did these 'acts' by theatrical performers and critics: in practice and writing. This investigation is situated within such a socio-political context and performance tradition but also, through the queer moment, aims to gain new critical insights, via Butler, into the relationship between politics, ethics and queer performance.

Butler and the Politics of Performance

As implied by Butler's writings about the term, 'queer' has something to say to the politics of performance beyond textual resistance. It is possible to delineate a relationship between 'queer' and embodied politics in order to demonstrate the possibilities for re-politicising 'materiality', so often lamented by the earlier critics of queer theory for its apparent 'absence' from the work of Butler (e.g. Edwards, 1998; Nussbaum, 1999). It is Butler's 'queer' perspective, above and beyond any other queer theorist, which I have found most useful as a theoretical framework for tracing this trajectory between 'queer', 'performance', 'performativity' and embodied 'politics', precisely because her work consistently revolves around these critical terms. Butler's work is always politically and ethically motivated through its valorisation of unknowingness and contingency, a line of questioning which continually seeks to both resist and extend the discursive norms by which subjects are defined and recognised.

Gill Jagger points out that the precise 'political' nature of Butler's approach lies in its recognition of the limitations of any political 'programmatic vision' and the violence and exclusions on which any kind of identity politics is predicated (2008: 162). This is because, as Samuel A. Chambers and Terrel Carver explore:

Most philosophical and political discourse of theory and practice take place in a genre of security, that is, the discourses are constructed around and towards securitising language, on the assumption that

this is the only way to make sense, be convincing and justify power-relations.

(2008: 162)

What Butler offers instead, they suggest, is a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', which refuses this approach (2008: 161). Hers is not a theory of politics or a political philosophy, but rather a 'clearly politicised philosophy': though it operates through excavating linguistic structures, it does so to produce stronger foundations for embodied politics. The refusal to passively accept linguistic structures is 'productive, and therefore anything but anti-political' (2008: 162).

To live a life politically is 'to recognize one's relations to others, one's relation to power, and one's responsibility to strive for a collective, more inclusive future' (Salih, 2004: 13). In combination, political critique and practice might change one's perspective on a world that seems familiar and the relations of power, which produce the norms that recognise certain subjectivities and disenfranchise others. Performance can open up the same political possibilities.

This desire to marry a queer political vision that recognises a need to negotiate a linguistic/representational critique with an embodied (though contingent) performance practice has also been echoed by queer performance scholars who have wished to re-politicise materiality. For example, though 'presence' might be 'discounted by some poststructuralist theory as a metaphysics that implies an

unchanging innateness to gender and sexuality' (Dolan, 2001: 33), Sue-Ellen Case celebrates its political possibilities:

And 'presence' – showing up – at activist disruptions, at live performances, in collective venues, reclaims the 'live' – the body – the visible – looking for lesbians in a political sense. It is live performance as politics, as theater, the play of positional masks, sweating flesh and clapping hands that finally animates what cyberpunks call the "meat." For presence as body, as visibility, in the collective, once abandoned, i-identity once gone, promotes the new sense of performativity in which the body is a trope and performance part of the allure of reading and writing.

(Case, 2009: 60)

Of course, Case's emphasis on the 'live' could be considered problematic from the perspective of Auslander's critique of the live/mediatised binary investigated in the Introduction. Here the focus on 'liveness' might suggest that it is possible for performance not to be contaminated by mediatised culture, on the 'outside' of the ideologies of capital and reproduction. Rather than focusing on the problems of this binary, however, it is Case's shift from poststructuralism towards 'materiality', which interests me here. Similarly Jill Dolan, in her earlier arguments, was committed to the fact that 'there is something that can't be so quickly dismissed about the emotional charge of what identity politics has come to describe too fixedly' (1993: 17). In *Geographies of Learning* she argues that 'performance offers us a practice

that lets us rehearse new social arrangements, in ways that require visceral investments of bodies' (2001: 16) and that those interested in performativity 'might profitably reconsider the materiality of theater as a palpable, embodied site of potential social change' (2001: 18). This interest has been developed further in *Utopia in Performance* (2005). Although her perspectives still remain steeped in feminism, queer theory and critical race studies, and are concerned with how performance positions the politics of identity, she is now equally concerned with 'how performances address something we might call our common humanity' (2005: 22).

As I consider myself primarily a practitioner, I also share these concerns: it is the actual practice of performance – of 'being in the [embodied] moment' – which inspires this project. The materiality of a body – any body – is fundamentally imbued with time passing and the temporal limits placed on all organic entities, if not all things: each passing moment has its significance even if it is vacuous; as bodies continue to live, they die. 'Being in the moment' of performance might tell us something about that paradox. 'Being' in the embodied moment, however, presumes a particular ontology. To avoid this and emphasise performance as an epistemological process, perhaps '*becoming* in the embodied moment' is a phrase better suited to my investigations. Crucial to this sense of embodiment is a non-ontological understanding of, or a processual experience of, the term 'materiality'.

Defining Materiality

‘Materiality’ is a challenging term because it relates in both complementary and complex ways to several key issues of this thesis: the actual ‘material’ performances of which I speak, the ‘material’ embodied politics en-acted in those performances, the material body (as recognised through language and discourse) and also – and most difficult perhaps – the materiality of the body, which exists beside/beyond language and discourse but cannot be referred to without it. Despite their individual specifications, these ‘modalities of matter’, as Butler (citing Althusser) calls them (Butler: 1993: 69), do not exist independently but affect each other, they *matter* to each other, in complex – sometimes problematic, sometimes productive – ways.

Butler’s formulations of materiality have often been a target for criticisms. In addition to those critiques of Jeffreys, Nussbaum and Miller previously mentioned, theorist Barbara Epstein has argued that ‘the assertion that sexual difference is socially constructed strains belief’ and such a statement is founded on what she believes to be the self-evident fact that ‘the vast majority of humans are born male and female’ (*cited in* Salih, 2002: 143). In the same vein, Toril Moi insists that the body is ‘real’ and ‘substantial’ and rejects the notion that matter and language are indissoluble, insisting that Butler risks ignoring ‘the concrete, historical body that loves, suffers and dies’ (*cited in* Salih, 2002: 143).

In fact, these responses indicate a misinterpretation of Butler’s theorisation of matter because, throughout her work, Butler is careful not to deny such a body: ‘For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and

violence ... But their irrefutability in no way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means' (1993: xi). The point was never to insist that everything is discursively produced or dispute the materiality of the body. *Bodies that Matter* constitutes 'partial and overlapping genealogical efforts to establish the normative conditions under which the materiality of the body is framed and formed, and, in particular, how it is formed through differential categories' (1993: 17). For Butler, to investigate the conditions through which body-subjects emerge, operate and 'materialise' is not to do away with the subject. She concedes that there is an 'outside' to that which is constructed by discourse however, 'it is that which can only be thought – when it can – in relation to discourse' (Butler, 1993: 8). Therefore, though there is a 'material body', which exists beside/beyond language and representation, she argues that it can only be referred to through language and representation.

This 'material body' might usefully be considered as that which Elin Hurley calls the 'feeling body': it is affected by, and physiologically responsive to, its environment, it can experience ambient mood, and it is capable of interpreting its own physiological signals as emotions (2009: 36). Referring to that 'body' in this way enacts a form of bracketing for the purpose of analysis: it is a provisional definition because the feeling body cannot ever exist independently from the material body, in Butler's sense, as a 'pure' concept, independent of language and discourse. I think, however, this separation is helpful to illuminating the following crucial point of this thesis:

The feeling body is theatre's focus: theatre requires a perceiving person in order to *be*. The feeling body is also the vehicle for theatre's images and execution. The feeling body is, then, both the basis and the means of theatre.

(Hurley: 2009: 36)

Throughout what follows, attempts will be made to clearly differentiate between this *feeling* body, and the more nuanced approach to the material body that Butler talks of. To fully understand this approach we must consider what she calls the 'contradictions of bodily autonomy' and the 'chiasmus' of materiality.

The Contradictions of Bodily Autonomy: the chiasmus of materiality

Wide ranging and complicated analysis has emerged in recent years regarding the 'status' of the body in performance, but Butler has perhaps most clearly nuanced it in relation to 'queerness' and 'performativity'²². In *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler develops a notion of a bodily autonomy that is riddled with contradiction:

In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, "one's own," that over which we must claim rights of autonomy ... Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the

²²For recent brief discussions about current research methods involved in theorising bodies cf. Colette Conroy (2010) and *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011: 217-18).

very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own.

The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine.

(2004: 20-21)

The organised field of language within which the body emerges always already constitutes it. She calls this complicated relation of language and the body a 'chiasmus' to indicate the impossibility of separating their mutual interdependency in the way knowledge about the body is produced. Performativity is not only about speech acts but also about bodily acts, but these bodily acts are always already constituted by language.

It is from this perspective that Butler opens up her interrogation of gender to the realm of sexual difference and sexed bodies:

Sex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way to distinguish between what is 'materially' true, and what is 'culturally' true about a sexed body. I don't mean to suggest that purely cultural signs produce a material body, but only that the body does not become sexually readable without those signs, and that those signs are

irreducibly cultural and material ones.

(2004: 87, emphasis added)

Such irreducibility should not be misconstrued to suggest that the body is reducible to language. I am not, through Butler, making a case for the primacy of language; rather, the inter-relational aspect of chiasmus gestures toward a *sense* of materiality, which precedes discourse, but yet cannot be interpreted without it. So bodies are not merely material, neither are they primarily cultural, though they are principally recognised by Butler as culturally ‘materialised’. Rather than denying the reality of materiality, Butler’s focus (according to Jagger) is ‘on the role of language and signification (and the exclusions, repudiations and unthought) in the production of any apparent reality *in its materiality*: in this case the materiality of the body in what is taken to be its simply given and obvious specificity’ (2008: 11).

This chiasmic notion of materiality is key to our understanding of queer moments, as I will be arguing that performance has the potential to produce, momentarily, a paradoxical sense of a body, which exists beside/beyond language but cannot be articulated without it. Indeed, Butler views bodily autonomy as ‘a lively paradox’ (2004: 21), although she never actually frames its contradictions as such; for example, ‘my body is and is not mine’ (2004: 21) is a contradictory statement rather than a paradoxical one. One of the primary aims of this thesis is to find ways of transforming Butler’s contradiction of bodily autonomy into performative paradoxes via the notion of ‘queer moments’.

Butler's formulation signals that there is an 'excess', absence or lacuna, which cannot be 'touched' by language, a 'feeling' body – 'my body' – that exists beyond chiasmic materiality. I will gesture towards this 'material' body beside/beyond language and representation in various ways throughout the thesis. As well as using Butler's contradictory formulation, I will also refer to this excess as the 'feeling body'. I will, however, be arguing that this sense of 'materiality' is something that can be *shared* between subject/other. That is to say, queer moments simultaneously evoke the unrepresentable trace of the 'other' as well the 'subject', a sense that is perhaps not fully implied by Butler's statement or the 'feeling body'. That is why I will also sometimes refer to this experience of materiality beside/beyond language as a form of 'visceral imaging': you can 'image' something of the other through your 'own' viscera. In the terms of my thesis, it is in-between these three complementary but individually nuanced formulations of 'materiality' that the ghost of the queer subject might 'appear'.

Introducing the Non/Human

Another key concept crucial for our understanding of the relationship between queer moments and chiasmic materiality is what Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird call the 'non/human' (2008). Starting with a concept of 'queer subjectivity', I will develop this notion to argue it is through producing a spectre of the 'non/human' – inter-relationally between performer and spectator – that queer moments might *touch* the spectator in a profoundly political way. The 'non/human' emerges as a queer notion of subjectivity.

The non/human does not replace queer subjectivity (a sense of the body-subject that exists both through and beyond language and discourse), but rather has evolved as a philosophical concept alongside queer theory's investigation into the subject. For example, Giffney and Hird, in *Queering the Non/Human* (2008), specifically posit the term 'non/human' as a queer challenge to normative subjectivities:

[W]hile the slash opens out onto – facilitates even – explorations of literal, figural, metaphorical and material relationships, transmutations and hybridisations between the Human and the nonhuman, its positioning marks out the impossibility of applying a hermetic seal to the distinction between – however temporary or shifting – what gets to count as Human and nonhuman.

(2008: 3)

The capitalisation of 'Human' in opposition to 'nonhuman' indicates, what Giffney and Hird view as, the cultural primacy of the former category; their 'queer' perspective considers the norms through which subjects might be considered as human or not human.

Similarly, some notion akin to the 'non/human' – considered as a destabilizing concept that articulates queer subjectivity – may have always informed the majority of Butler's writing that engages with the contradictions of bodily autonomy (1993; 2004; 2006; 2009). Even if not specifically named as such, the non/human seems 'present' in her critically sustained interrogation into how subjectivity might produce

violating exclusions enacted against 'the inhuman, the beyond human, the less than human' (2004: 218). To work against these exclusions, she argues that the 'human' 'must become strange to itself, even monstrous, to re-achieve the human on another plane' (2004: 191).

It is important to note that the notion of the non/human has not emerged exclusively in relation to queer theory. For example, Kershaw's *Theatre Ecology* explores the paradoxical 'non-human in the human' as that which 'connects homo sapiens to all other organisms in the world whilst also being the basis for a common humanity' (2007: 214). The term non/human for me, however, is deeply entrenched in queer theory's concerns, for several reasons. As Butler argues, a certain departure needs to take place from the 'human', 'in order to start the process of remaking the human' (2004: 3-4); this process does not necessitate the erasure of the human subject, but must rather continue through producing a constant state of tension: between hope and anxiety. Interrogating the 'human' demands we challenge, yet work through, the 'conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all', which includes but moves beyond the institutionalised norms of sexed and gendered subjects (2004: 57). This is why the non/human, for me, is a key component of 'queerness'.

Desire

Another bi-product of my investigation of 'materiality' has been a need to consider the question of 'desire' in relation to performance. How might desires that circulate

through and between performers and spectators affect the politics of performance?

This sense of desire does not need to be complicated by the way it has been developed and appropriated by both phenomenology and psychoanalysis, the full history of which demands more discussion than I give it here²³. What is important for the purpose of my argument is that when I use the term 'desire' it is meant as 'that feeling or emotion which is directed to the attainment or possession of some object from which pleasure or satisfaction is expected; longing, craving; a particular instance of this feeling, a wish' or a 'physical or sensual appetite; lust' (OED, Vol. IV: 522).

Part of my argument is to question the limitations of what I call 'queer reading' practices when investigating the politics of performance. 'Queer reading' for me is the practice of analysing how performances' may produce/reinforce heteronormative illusions of sex and gender (e.g. Case, 2009; Dolan, 2009). This is not to deny the importance of those practices; such approaches are part of a necessary 'queer' political strategy, which challenges institutionalised heteronormativity: it can identify how theatre potentially produces representations that exclude and violate subjectivities. Reading practices, however, have limits in investigations of how and why a subject/person might perceive embodied experience as feeling. They cannot always account for desires that are part of the

²³ For an additional exploration of how the meaning of 'desire' has evolved in relation to psychoanalysis cf. David Macey's *Critical Theory* (2001: 94-95). Butler also investigates a notion of 'desire' inspired by G.W.F Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1979). In *Subjects of Desire* she defines it as 'an interrogative mode of being, a corporeal questioning of identity and place' (1987: 9). Rather than referring to 'the kind of focused wanting that usually goes by that name' (1987: 26), desire here alludes to the need for recognition and self-consciousness. However, 'desire' for me in this context does indeed only refer to such modes of focused wanting.

interactivity of live events. As Dolan argues: 'performance often unleashes the desire that flows just below the surface of the settings in which we work' (2001: 16).

Admittedly, 'desire' here is perhaps an object of belief, but one that I am interested in pursuing due to the 'fact' that I have often experienced 'desire' whilst watching live performance. What happens when such desire is activated between bodies in space? If, for me, desires are vectors that can shape the contours of engagement in performance, how might they provide a challenge in accounting for queer moments and how might I respond to that challenge through writing?

This following case-studies work towards an idea of a 'visceral reading' that I will explore more fully in Chapter 6 . They aim to expose viscerally inflected responses to performance, to move the reader beyond accounts of how queer desires may be *represented*, to therefore encounter how those desires themselves – as circuits of flows and energies – might constitute the dynamics of that performances' politics.

As Tim Miller puts it:

For even as desire motivates the subject and materiality of the content of a theatre piece, it also sets spinning the other relationships in the house – between the performers onstage, between the people in Row A and those in Row B, between the audience members and the bodies onstage – in a tango of charged possibilities of queer spectatorship.

(Miller, 2009: x)

He goes on to state how theatre is drenched in desire, sex and bodily fluids: from its language of adoration – they loved me; they were begging for more – to its often ‘successful climax’, not to mention the human secretions – saliva, sneezes and sweat – which are excreted throughout the performance (Miller, 2009: x). Dolan also often talks about ‘desire’ in her work. In *Presence and Desire*, for example, she states that ‘since I work in theatre studies, I’m invested in the movement of bodies in space, in the real-time charge of desire between performers and between spectators on stage (1993: 36). Later in *Theatre and Sexuality* she suggests that theatre is:

a place of fantasy and longing, of fleeting exchange between spectators and performers. With its liminal status as both real and not, as ephemeral and transformational, theatre has long been a site where misfits and the marginalized have congregated.

(2009: 3)

Interestingly, however, Dolan’s analysis never really engages with such desire as problematic. ‘Desire’ functions as no more than a vague metaphor: ‘our theatre can bridge theory and activism by offering a sexual vernacular for speaking desire in performance, and invite the world to partake with us in the politics of our pleasure’ (1993: 102). How might this thesis engage with ‘desire’ – and its potentially destructive powers of scopic pleasure, voyeurism and fetish – more specifically in relation to the politics of performance? This is one of the primary concerns of Chapter 4, which investigates the production of *XXX* by the Spanish company Fura dels Baus.

Queer Ethics

Before I can be more precise about how queer moments, for me, function 'politically', I need to briefly consider the subject of 'ethics', particularly in relation to performance. This is because, as I have already demonstrated, Butler has highlighted how politics and ethics (via performativity) are potentially interrelated. If ethics is the philosophical engagement with the question, *how shall I act?*, then, as Ridout in *Theatre & Ethics* (2009) explains, the fact that this question might be applied to both performance and behaviour suggests that ethics and theatre already share a fruitful relationship. Furthermore, ethics and politics might be closely linked because once one begins to ask how 'we' as individuals should behave, and how best to organise the ways in which lives are lived with one another, such questions may become political (2009: 12). Rather than emerging as separate spheres in this thesis, for me ethics and politics interact in complementary ways:

The moment of ethical encounter in work ... can thus be the basis for thought, feeling or action within the sphere of politics. Ethics does not quite displace either aesthetics or politics. Aesthetic experience becomes the condition of possibility for a particular kind of ethical relationship. The ethical relationship becomes, in its turn, the ground upon which political action might be attempted.

(2009: 65-66)

Although Ridout does not mention Butler, his work seems to bear a direct relation to how her writing also attempts to work through the complex, potentially symbiotic,

relationship between ethics and politics. His definition might be considered to complement Butler's statement that 'ethics displaces from politics' (Butler and Connolly, 2000: 5). That is to say, the exploration of ethical relationships might lead to political action; the 'ethics' and 'politics' of performance could potentially share a chiasmic relationship. Butler, however, makes a distinction between their epistemologies: ethics does not start from the use of power, whereas politics does (Lloyd, 2007: 154). For the purposes of my argument, queer moments are political because they uncover the power structures that legitimise normative subjectivities and they are ethical because they arise (unpredictably) from particular performative conditions that investigate relationships between subject and other. Ridout suggests that there is something unique about theatre's ability to dramatise ethical problems in the presence of the spectator. Live performance might allow one to think about ethics from a social and political perspective because it can produce a situation of mutual spectatorship: 'we watch ourselves watching people engaging with an ethical problem while knowing that we are being watched in our watching' (2009: 15)^{xvii} (*aside*).

This notion of the 'face to face' encounter returns us to Kelleher's earlier remark on how performance might allow us to entertain the demands of strangers. The fragility of the actors that Kelleher talks about is echoed in Ridout's assertion that performance 'invites the spectator to assume ethical responsibility for the fragile life of the other' (2009: 8). It is here he finds the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas – which examines ethics through an exploration of an encounter with 'the face' – as potentially useful:

We might be able to develop a model of performance as an ethical encounter, in which we come face to face with the other, in a recognition of our mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and a respect for difference.

(2009: 54)

Usefully, Butler offers an articulate account of Levinas' philosophy, theoretically bridging the relationship between queer theory, politics, ethics and performance, and providing a helpful framework for understanding how theatre might provide the environment for such an encounter and why this encounter might produce queer moments.

Butler's Philosophy of Freedom: the Levinasian Face

When queer theory first emerged in the 1990s, cultural theorists were wary that a focus on desire – and its liberation from normative structures – could lead to ethical difficulties. As Jeffrey Weeks argued, if desire is liberated from the 'solidity of traditional narratives and relations of domination and subordination and individual satisfaction and pleasure are the only measure of sexual ethics, where does such liberation end?' (Weeks, 1995: 29). The danger is, as Joseph Bristow points out, that 'the right to choose a particular erotic lifestyle can well be carried out in an unethical spirit that overemphasizes the satisfaction of personal desires at the expense of other people's needs' (1997: 222). Bristow cites Donald Morton's concern that queer theory encourages a notion of desire 'regarded as autonomous – unregulated and unencumbered' (1997: 222).

The question of 'where does such liberation end?' is answered by Butler's notion of a *philosophy of freedom*. For her there is a *common human vulnerability* that is a condition of human life, something which we all share: 'a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot pre-empt' (2006: 29). Though she insists on naming the condition, she also insists that through doing so she cannot represent its source. However, she indicates that perceiving and recognizing vulnerability surely has to be the foundation for ethics.

In *Undoing Gender* Butler is aware, it could be argued, that any attempt to articulate a universal human condition as a basis for politics automatically performs its own violation '*in the name of the norm*, a norm of non-violence, a norm of respect, a norm that governs or compels the respect for life itself' (2004: 206). Despite this, in order to proceed politically, there are perhaps norms that need to be established. This is the normative aspiration she defines in an attempt to articulate a 'philosophy of freedom' that 'has to do with the ability to live and breathe and move' (2004: 219). What moves her politically 'is the moment in which a subject – a person, a collective – asserts a right or entitlement to a liveable life when no such prior organization exists, when no clearly enabling convention is in place' (2004: 224). She recognises that fascists can equally invoke rights to conduct murderous acts for which there are no prior entitlements. This is where she makes a distinction between remaining critical of how language and representations establish norms that exclude and violate subjectivities and a need to work towards a *norm of non-*

violence. In assessing which position to support, the question that drives her philosophy of freedom is: which processes intensify the violence of exclusion and which are working to counter violation? (Butler, 2004: 225) Any answer to this is not necessarily easy of course because some ‘violations’ may enable *and* disenfranchise on different terms, for different subjects. Through asking this question, however, a ‘dialogue’ between linguistic/representational critique and material practice can take place. This question could equally be applied when examining the potential violations that might be produced when the excesses of desire are indulged. It is through such philosophy that ‘one must make substantive decisions about what will be a less violent future’ (2004: 224-225). This echoes the concept of *enabling violations* considered by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, whom Butler often cites in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). The need to distinguish between violations which enable and those that disenfranchise – both discursively and materially – is an ethical necessity. For Butler, recognising common human vulnerability is a crucial part of this differentiation and she explores Emmanuel Levinas’ notion of the ‘face’ as a way of investigating how such vulnerability provides the basis for an exploration of claims regarding ethics.

According to Butler, the Levinasian ‘face’ can produce the most basic mode of responsibility. As Levinas writes:

The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*) but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die

alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death.

Thus the face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other ... To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardise the life of the other.

(Levinas and Kearney, 1986: 23-24)

For Levinas, this mode of recognition challenges what Spinoza identified as the *conatus essendi* – or the right to existence – which Spinoza defines as the basic principle of all intelligibility. The face produces a need to respond to the other which interrupts the human impetus for self-survival based on violence. This, argues Levinas, is also the foundation for love, because through this suspension of potential violence there is a recognition that one's own survival is dependent on the other; meaning is discovered relationally – intersubjectively – not simply through one's own being in the world. Of course, this recognition does not necessarily precipitate the turning away from a murderous act. Just because the face performatively announces 'thou shalt not kill', that does not deny the possibility of murder; as Levinas says, this 'ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity' (1985: 87). Rather, 'the appearance in being of these "ethical peculiarities" – the humanity of man – is a rupture of being. It is significant, even if being resumes and recovers it' (1985: 87).

For Butler, the face announces an ethical relation, but it does so beyond language. This is because 'the imperative it delivers is not immediately translatable into a prescription that might be linguistically formulated and followed' (2006: 131). If this is the case, however, we cannot simply collapse the 'face' into the imperative of the core Biblical command, as this would fail to account for its more complex relation to language/materiality: the chiasmus of materiality. As she goes on to explain, the words through which we come to understand this command – 'thou shalt not kill' – cannot fully deliver an understanding of how the face comes to mean. That is because 'it is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation here' (2006: 134).

In her analysis of another essay by Levinas, 'Peace and Proximity', Butler explores how these complexities are dealt with through a linguistic phrase that does not accomplish the sentence form: 'the face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other' (1996: 167). Here she views the avoidance of the verb as enacting a sort of suspension, where the face cannot be reduced to the subjective essentialism that the completed sentence might indicate. This suspension within the 'sentence' is akin to Levinas's view that humanity is a rupture of being because it is 'is both less and more than a sentence form. To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself' (Butler, 2006: 134). Butler here is referring to the common human vulnerability that is beside/beyond representation: again, that chiasmic materiality. The face therefore does not succeed language as a condition which governs ethical conduct but rather,

through silently implying the meaning of precariousness, if it ‘at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics’ (Butler, 2006: 135)^{xviii} (*aside*).

Returning to the challenges of defining a normative aspiration of non-violence, Butler argues that the Levinasian face does not provide an easy definition produced from a peaceful place but rather arises ‘from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence’ (2006: 137). Recognising the face, recognising common human vulnerability, produces an intersubjective struggle, where subject/other and their relation to language/materiality are in a process of negotiation. As Butler suggests, this negotiation cannot be represented through language because it is fundamentally chiasmic. She notes that this chiasmus is performed through the paradox-like formulation of Levinas’ utterance that is less and more than a sentence. It seems that Levinas’ sentence attempts to ‘stall’ the face: to momentarily suspend the ongoing backwards and forwards motion of the chiasmic struggle. This type of ‘stalling’ is part of what queer moments have to offer the profound politics of performance²⁴.

²⁴ As I neared the completion of this thesis I discovered an article written by Fintan Walsh entitled ‘*Big Love: Relationality, Ethics and the Art of Letting Go*’ (2010). He also utilises Butler to:

explore how performance might enlighten an ethic of non-violent being with others, and non-violent being in the world ... ‘Letting go’ is the strategically utilitarian term deployed here to think about a performative act that loosens the point of attachment between the subject and the symbolic law, while paving the way for relatively non-aggressive conditions of being to emerge.

(2010:17)

For him ‘letting go’ is about ‘stopping short of violence in order that life might go on, especially when one is already heavily afflicted by the law’ (2010: 29).

The Politics of the Profound

I now wish to clarify what I mean by the 'profound' and 'political' dimensions of queer moments in performance. In *Presence and Desire* (1993), Dolan makes a case for the political potential of the emotional charge of performance. She cites Ed Cohen's call for a modified version of *somatic depth* in which '(e)/motion' might, quite literally, *move* people into political action: 'I *feel* there *is* something "different" about the body: I *believe* feeling is the difference that bodies make, a difference that *moves* people to action' (Dolan, 1993: 17). Similarly, Kelleher argues that the political potential of performance – that thinking through of relations of power – is as much to do with the unpredictability and liveness of the performance event as it is to do with what that event is understood to represent (2009: 29). For him, politics means so much more than thinking; it is also acting upon those relations of power in order to change them, and often the motivating and dynamic political impulse which inspires these acts is derived from that which 'gets under our skin', that *something* which 'remains with us' (2009: 19).

It is precisely this relation between somatic depth and a political 'trace' left after a performance event that I am attempting to articulate through proposing and investigating a *politics of the profound*. Queer moments, as well as provisionally articulating an inter-relational sense of the non/human, are simultaneously instances of profoundly *felt* experience, which are both a product of political/ethical dynamics but also produce an emotional trace with a political charge; they are

politically and ethically *affective*. For Erin Hurley, such ‘feeling’ is what makes theatre matter (2009: 2). For Anne Bogart, her job as a director is to ‘set up the circumstances in which feeling can occur’ (Hurley, 2009: xi). This is not done so she can manipulate or control the sensations and emotions experienced by the audience at a given ‘particular moment’: such an attempt, Bogart argues, would lead to a facile theatre experience, forgotten upon its conclusion. Rather, she argues that ‘complex and memorable feelings in the theatre are a glorious by-product of a very precise work on form, psychology, and timing’ (Hurley, 2009: xi). In a sense, this thesis is an investigation into the ‘circumstances’ and ‘precise work’ that have the potential to produce queer moments of profound – and political – feeling.

‘Profound’ as defined by the OED implies a force ‘situated or extending far beneath the surface; deep-seated, deep-reaching’ (Vol. XII: 582). It is also ‘a condition, state or quality: Having depth of intensity; intense, thorough, extreme, very great’ (Vol. XII: 583). It is ‘eminently deep, or the deepest part of something; a vast depth; an abyss’ (Vol. XII: 583). As an adjective it carries with it a sense of that somatic depth of feeling that this thesis explores. Not only that, but also there is a spatiality and temporality evoked by the term through its ‘depth’ and potential ‘extension’. Indeed, profound experience can extend, not merely downwards, but also outwards, through the ‘political’ ‘ripples’ that extend beyond the intensity of the queer moment. I am also inspired by the notion that profundity is potentially infinite: an abyss; because of this, any attempt to define the profundity and queerness of a moment of performance is provisional; such moments are an impossible sense of the anti-foundational: an absolute ‘truth’ without foundations. As we will see shortly,

this is why 'paradox' comes to play such a fundamental role in understanding queer moments: as provisional articulations of logical impossibilities.

Of course, applying Levinas' ethical philosophy to performance may produce naïve interpretations. As argues, potentially in this transfer between philosophy and performance:

It removes the unknowability and anonymity of the face; it dilutes the absolute quality of the demand to infinite responsibility; it obscures the idea that the self comes into being only through this encounter with, and infinite subjection to, the other ... the ethics left behind after this 'misappropriation' is [potentially] a lazy form of mundane liberalism, in which we are wearily enjoined to be nice to each other, and is thus of no use to anyone.

(2009: 55)

Though queer moments are not *necessarily* rare, I do however hope to retain the nuanced complexity suggested by the Levinasian face in their analysis. Additionally, to avoid the above charges of laziness, and in contrast to Dolan's 'utopian performatives', I aim not to assume that the embodied knowledge of the 'queer moment' is collectively felt, although I believe its impact may still resonate politically beyond the subjective experience.

The question of the 'political' is of course a difficult one: how such moments function politically cannot be determined in advance; however, in the same way as Butler's body of work has something to say to politics, so too queer moments can usefully illuminate cultural, institutionalised and legislative violations of subjectivities. Furthermore in the same way as Butler has argued that ethics has something to say to politics (Butler and Connolly, 2005: 5), so too might the ethical encounters, which potentially produce queer moments. In this sense, queer moments may become *ethico-political*.

This is because I believe that theatre offers a fruitful place to investigate how humans might co-exist ethically through exploring and *transforming* structures of power and practices that normalise sexual and gender hierarchies. This is due to its ability to utilise the structure of self/other through the performer/spectator relationship. Through investigating that relationship, this thesis will also explore how putative political struggles against the heteronormative, concerned as they are with questions of power, might provide the context for rehearsing ethical encounters^{xix} (*aside*).

Such ethico-political processes involve critically negotiating the linguistic and material dualisms offered by live performance and the challenges those might provide. I want to offer a nuanced approach to how 'queer politics' in performance might produce their own violations from an ethical perspective; so for example, I will argue in Chapter 3 that XXX by Fura dels Baus does not achieve acceptable political

force from a queer perspective because its 'politics' is ethically contradictory (in, for example, the way the performance did not *sufficiently* critique sexual violence).

As well as being committed to exploring how the bodies of live performance are differentiated by the violations of language and representation, I am also committed to interrogating how those bodies might reveal a sense of something profoundly shared. These concerns are also 'political' because they indicate processes that aim to deal with struggles over relations of power between subjects in a given space. Such concerns have partly been shaped by the political history of queer activism; however, I also consider performance from a perspective that might add to the debates around visibility politics, through focusing on *transformation*, as well as resistance, *beyond* representation. For me the transformative possibilities of performance lies, not within the language and representations through which I might describe it, but rather in those undetermined 'spaces' that are, potentially, beyond ideology. My aim in this thesis is to attempt to 'reproduce' such spaces via doubled reflexivity (with strong paradox as its paradigm), thus shifting a focus on the 'politics of performance' from resistant to transformative versions of 'freedom' achieved in/through queer moments. That is to say, the double reflexivity of paradox potentially produces an excess of truths, which exceed interpretative closure. If the limits of language/representation produce resistance, then paradoxical excesses might move beyond these limits through transforming dualisms into embodied traces of queer 'freedom'.

I am also arguing that the traces of such moments have the potential profoundly to 'move' a spectator to 'act' politically; for example, through producing a desire to translate – into action or writing perhaps – what was experienced after the moment has passed. To that end, the writing of this thesis – moved as I have been to write it – may be considered a political act, and possibly an example of the way in which the queer moments that inspired it continue to function politically after their 'moment' has been and gone?^{xx} (*personal*).

Queer Moments

Of course, 'moments' often appear as points of reference in writings about performance²⁵. From Bogart's attention to the circumstances that might produce 'particular moments' to performance theorist Geraldine Harris' argument that:

The political effect of any given work is not a matter of authorship or form, or of individual readers, or of interpretative communities, or institutional, social or material location, theories or practices, but of the specific dynamic existing between these diverse elements at a particular *moment* in time.

(1999: 172)

In addition, Kelleher claims that 'theatrical moments' have the capacity to re-imagine a future of new human relations, 'a relation to the future of the world that was not

²⁵ Considering 'moments' leads me to question: how long is a moment in time? There is a range of implications to this question, which could lead us to other disciplines such as quantum physics and theory (where the phenomenon of 'paradoxes' also strongly feature). I merely note this here as a potential avenue for further research.

available *then*, but could be available now, at least as an idea, if only in the theatre' (2009: 53).

Similarly, in her 'queer' writings, Butler also usefully focuses on 'moments'. For her it is not only important to understand how gender is institutionally normalised but to 'trace the *moments* where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable' (2004: 216, emphasis added). The 'moments' of these examples are more metaphorical than what I have in mind for 'queer moments', which, I suggest, are specifically linked to epistemological/ontological chiasmus.

Having thought that I coined the term 'queer moment', I discovered it had previously been used in other queer writings. For example, in the title of Alan Sinfield's monograph *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (1994a), which explores how the Oscar Wilde trials lead to a particular historical instance when the relationship between effeminacy, desire and biological sex crystallised to produce 'the brilliantly precise image' of the modern day queer^{xxi} (*history*). This moment is a product of a genealogical enquiry. As Butler defines it: the enquiry into the conditions of emergence (*Entstehung*) of what is called history, a *moment* of emergence that is not finally distinguishable from fabrication' (cited in Salih, 2002: 10, emphasis added). The typicality of Wilde's queerness is after-the-effect: the trials helped produce a major shift in public perceptions towards same-sex passion (Sinfield, 1994: 3).

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, an analysis of queer theory and its relation to the interpretation of mass culture, Alex Doty also refers to 'queer moments' which can emerge 'whenever *anyone* produces or responds to culture' (1997: 3). In her *Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan attempts to specify these instances further, as uncanny moments of disruption which 'destabilise heteronormativity, and the meanings and identities it engenders, by bringing to light all that is disavowed by, and yet integral to, heteronormative logic' (2003: 192).

Providing another example, Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* argues that phenomenology – as a philosophy of embodied experience – is full of queer moments; in particular, she references Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002). For him, claims Ahmed, queer moments are not only 'the intellectual experience of disorder, but the final experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us' (2002: 296). Furthermore, Ahmed argues that, whereas Merleau-Ponty explores how such moments are overcome and bodies are re-oriented, 'if we stay with such moments then we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such a moment may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find joy and excitement in the horror' (2006: 4). Conversely, rather than looking at how we stay with such instances, I am interested in why the contradictory phenomenon of queer moments might stay with one.

With this in mind, 'queer' – in relation to a moment of performance – has multiple functions in this thesis. It will denote not merely a disruption of the ontological categories of heteronormativity, 'gender' and 'sex', but also – echoing the shift in

Butler's *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2009) – the disruption of the ontological category of the 'human'. Such a move is arguably problematic, as that loss of specificity may be interpreted as a step towards assimilation, whereby 'queer' becomes normalised through its incorporation into a general theory of difference. However, this move will be continually considered through a mode of double-edged critical thinking, which hopefully remains in the 'original' spirit of queer: 'never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purpose' (1993: 228).

Furthermore, in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) Sedgwick has forcefully argued that so endemic is the heterosexual/homosexual binary to modern Western civilization that understanding of virtually any aspect of that culture is 'not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis for modern homo/heterosexual definition' (1990: xiv-xv). Inspired by this notion, queer theorist Michael Warner argued that 'the dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are' (1993: xiii). That is a valuable insight for this thesis as it seeks to extend the scope of 'queer' beyond the specificity of its 'origins' in relation to theories of gender and sexuality, in order to embrace an analysis of 'human' subjectivity.

Sarah Salih argues, "'Queer'" is a radical appropriation of a term which had previously been used to wound and abuse, and at least part of its radicalism lies in its resistance

to straightforward (so to speak) definition' (Salih, 2002: 8). Sedgwick's arguments however, suggest that queer theory might indeed have something to say about *all* subjectivities and therefore the politics of human subjects in performance. How to articulate this sense of queer's – albeit problematic – 'universal' appeal whilst retaining its relational challenge to the *norm* will be an ongoing methodological challenge for my argument. That is why, although I have thought long and hard about how other terms might function in relation to these moments – e.g. 'paradoxical moments', 'profound moments', 'sublime moments' (for reasons about to be revealed) – none of these terms offered the multi-vocal richness that 'queer' denotes, especially when considered in relation to the nuances of Butler's 'queer' mode of enquiry.

Furthermore, and importantly, though the OED does not explicitly reference phenomenology in its definition of 'queer', its explanation infers certain spatial and phenomenological connotations: 'Not in a normal condition; out of sorts; giddy, faint, or ill: *esp.* in phr. *To feel (or look) queer.*' (Vol. XII: 1014). Similarly, Sedgwick reminds us that 'queer' is derived from the Latin root of the word meaning 'across', from an original Indo-Latin root – 'torquere' – meaning 'to twist' and the English 'athwart' (Sedgwick 1993: xii). Perhaps the 'queer moment' therefore can function beyond and across the spatio-temporal moment of the 'present' performance, as both product/producer of a past, present and future politics. Is it really possible to approach such moments of disruption not merely from a representational perspective, but also as something embodied and experiential, as something *felt*? Can queer moments in performance not merely indicate the malleability and

transformability of ontological categories, but through *doing so*, viscerally transform those who might experience them? How best can we approach such ephemeral, visceral moments from a political perspective?

My conclusion to this chapter follows the lead of Robin Griffiths who has suggested that 'queer performance is ephemeral and merely visible "in the moment"' (2002, 35). In addition he argues that queer performances 'almost subliminally remain after the act of performance itself: the residue or "evidence" of what has transpired' (2002: 37). Queer here becomes a form of 'embodied knowledge' as explored by Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris in *Performance Practice and Process* (2008). Analysing a workshop conducted by Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw from the performance group Split Britches they write:

It was not that our experience of Lois and Peggy's process contradicted the various feminist and queer theories that have been used to discuss their work. Rather, what we found was that their process could be said to literally 'embody' these theories, but in a way that was not only distinct from, but was, in fact, in excess, of them. In short, the creative processes we encountered in and through these events started to reveal the necessary *limits* of the feminist, queer and postcolonial discourses that we had used to frame our project *as* theory and in ways that were productive and conducive to further critical thinking.

(2008: 9)

They suggest that 'being in the moment' of live interaction offers a far more complex and subtle ontological disruption than might be imagined by critics of presence who would associate such 'being' as presupposing a fixed and singular identity. Rather, such instances are 'not a moment of consciousness of a "self" but an embodied sense of intensive *interaction* and *interrelationship* with others and with one's surrounding, in which there is something like a "pause" in normative consciousness of self' (2008: 13). These are contradictory moments that 'acknowledge difference without either denying the possibility of community and connection or resorting to relativism' (2008: 10): a becoming in the embodied moment, perhaps.

The seeming impossibility of the queer moment with its conjuring of a body beside/beyond representation may resonate with Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the 'sublime'. In his essay 'What is Postmodernism?', Lyotard's 'sublime' is concerned with 'how to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists?' (1984: 78). How is it possible to make visible that there is something, which cannot be seen? Or we could consider it in relation to Roland Barthes' 'punctum', which in *Camera Lucida*, his study of photography, is presented as a moment beyond representation that 'pricks', (Barthes, 2000: 27) when a visceral trace is left from the experience. Or perhaps even his notion of 'jouissance' (Barthes, 1973): 'the asocial and potentially disorienting experience generated by avant-garde texts that bring the reader into

contact with a level corresponding to Julia Kristeva's semiotic'²⁶. The fact that such cross-referencing between terms is possible might support the fact, noted earlier in this introduction, that the evolution of 'queer theory' can never be traced back through a singular linear narrative²⁷.

However, throughout this thesis I turn mainly to Butler for further clarification in a bid for theoretical consistency. In her introduction to *Bodies That Matter* she discusses the construction – a response to the materialisation – of 'sex' as a temporal process that operates through the reiteration of norms:

As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalised effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labour of that norm.

(1993: 10)

It is in those 'gaps' and 'fissures' that I will be attempting to locate queer moments.

From this perspective, 'queer' is also usefully related to the concept of 'lacuna': a 'hiatus, blank, missing portion' or a 'gap, an empty space, spot, or cavity' (OED, Vol. VIII: 577).

²⁶ Kristeva's notion of the semiotic is a pre-linguistic level that exists prior to or beneath the structures and grammars of language (Macey, 1996: 348). Thus it resonates with chiasmic materiality and the body that exists beside/beyond representation.

²⁷ I will discuss Lyotard's 'sublime' in Chapter 3 with reference to the work of Franko B and 'jouissance' in Chapter 6 in relation to the performance by Lia Rodriguez's Brazilian dance company of *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*.

These words seem to indicate an absence, but also as Butler's explanation above demonstrates, this is not purely a vacuum: it is an absence that may provide some sort of 'substance', which helps lead us through and beyond what happens in queer moments of performance. In *effect*, it produces a ghost of a queer subject: present yet absent, substantial yet ephemeral. The 'queer moment', however, also produces a substantial and profound *affect*, despite the transience of the instant. As Ionesco once wrote: only the ephemeral is of lasting value (Hughes and Brecht, 1976: 38)

And so we return to paradox as possibly the queer linguistic formulation *par excellence*^{xxii} (*aside*). As Ionesco's insight demonstrates, a paradox can transform the relationship of two seemingly contradictory elements so that they simultaneously co-exist to produce truth(s) which move beyond their binaries. As Kershaw writes in *Theatre Ecology*, 'approaching such contradictions through the conditions of their reproduction – the making of strong paradoxes – may enable insight into truths that, as it were, override binaries without denying them' (2007: 117). Theatrical queer moments will thus emerge, in part, as moments of paradox: provisional instances of assimilated otherness within live performance that can have productive political affect.

Of course, just as the 'truth(s)' of linguistic paradoxes can only be grasped before their 'sense' slips away again, so here the queer moment is potentially an instant of environmentally unresolved clarity, but an overriding truth may be grasped through it nonetheless. What are the conditions most likely to allow queer moments to emerge in theatre? If such moments disrupt the ontological category of the human itself they might fleetingly produce something akin to the Levinasian face with its sense of common

human vulnerability. How might performance allow one to encounter the full complexity of such a 'queer' face? This thesis argues that the binaries of language and representation are a dynamic part of paradoxical expression. When live performance explores the relationship between performer and spectator as an ethical encounter it has the potential to reveal a shared chiasmic materiality – a sense of the non/human – through transforming such contradictions into performative paradoxes. Such paradoxes might produce something akin to the Levinasian face: a ghost of the queer subject. These instances of experience are potentially, profound, political and queer.

ⁱ On this point José Esteban Muñoz argues:

An especially troubling genealogy of queer theory is Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory*, a book that attempts to historicize queer discourse by narrating its debt to the homophile movement and lesbian feminism, and yet almost completely ignores queer theory's debt to radical women and men of color.

(1999: 203)

ⁱⁱ This has led Frederick S. Roden to conclude that 'Judith Butler's contribution to the fields of gender and sexuality studies, queer and contemporary feminist theories is nothing short of foundational' (Roden 2005: 36). In the *Blackwells Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth Century Philosophers* the 'Butler' entry describes performativity as the sine qua non of postmodern feminism. For further discussions of her wide-ranging influence cf. Sarah Salih's *Butler* (2002: 140-142) and Margaret Sönsen Breen and Warren J. Blumenfield's *Butler Matters*: 'the only collection to date that focuses on Butler's work and its application to various fields across the humanities and social sciences' (2005: 6).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is important to note that 'queer lens' is employed as a playfully provisional metaphor because my argument aims to reveal its limitations in relation to approaching the politics of performance. It is part of my argument that 'looking' at performance, refracted through a queer gaze, can only partially contribute to our understanding of a politics of performance. This thesis seeks to develop a theory, which moves queer theory's relation to performance beyond the practice of 'reading' to a more embodied, phenomenological and viscerally holistic approach.

^{iv} *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (2003) identifies the emergence of queer theory through a historical trajectory which begins with British sociologist Mary McIntosh's work on the 'homosexual role' in the 1960s, and the influence she had on further 'queer' historians such as Jonathan Ned Katz's *Gay American History* (1975), Jeffrey Week's *Coming Out* (1977) and John D'emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983). Each of these works emphasised the historicity of gay and lesbian identity.

In addition, Corber and Valocchi identify the influence of French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. In constructing her theory of performativity, Butler draws on Althusser. In his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', he argues that subjects recognize their own existence in terms of the dominant ideology of the society in which they live through the mechanism of 'interpellation': 'individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition, *individuals are always-already subjects*.' (1971: 164)

As Chapter 2 will investigate, there are resonances between the 'poststructuralist' approach of philosopher Jacques Derrida and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and queer theory:

If there is a common core to all the tendencies that have been described as poststructuralist, it lies in a reluctance to ground discourse in any theory of metaphysical origins, an insistence on the inevitable plurality and instability of meaning, a distrust of systematic scientificity, and the abandonment of the old Enlightenment project.

(Macey: 2000: 309)

In fact, in José Esteban Muñoz's exploration of the genealogy of queer theory, he also draws attention to the influence of poststructuralist Roland Barthes, whose work unpacks 'the ruses and signs of normativity' (1999: 21). Furthermore, he also argues that Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's neglected 1981 anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* has had an influence on queer theory.

^v As Janice McLaughlin argued in a paper delivered at the 'Sexualities, Cultures and Identities' conference at the University of Newcastle, 2003:

At times this critique has fallen into the trap of stereotype and has paid little attention to specific texts and arguments. As feminists have responded, often they have approached queer ideas in a similar way, replacing analysis of the arguments with accusations of cowardice and elitism.

(2003: 5)

^{vi} Musing on the non-teleological thematic narrative of Butler's writing, Sarah Salih argues:

If you were to attempt to 'plot' Butler's work on a graph, you would not find her ideas progressing in a straight line from A to M To Z; instead, the movement of her thought would resemble a Mobius strip, or a series of Mobius strips, exemplifying how her theories curve or circle around issues without attempting to resolve them.

(Salih, 2002: 3)

This metaphor of a mobius strip – a paradoxical formation – is entirely fitting here, because paradox, as we will see, is crucial to understanding how queer moments might be produced.

^{vii} This is not an entirely contemporary subject. In 1959 Ervin Goffman published his seminal sociology book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he used dramaturgical conceits and the metaphor of theatre to analyse human activity.

^{viii} For the purpose of this thesis I define 'queer performances' as those that aim to reveal how both social systems and the theatre apparatus itself re-produce and perpetuate gender and sex norms. Such performances are usually self-nominated as 'queer' by the artists that produce them. For further information on this topic, cf. 'Politics and Performance' section in this chapter.

^{ix} Each book in the 'Theatre & ...' series, edited by Jen Harvie and Dan Reballto, aims to explore 'connections between theatre and some aspect of the wider world, asking how theatre might illuminate the world and how the world might illuminate the theatre' (Harvie and Reballto, 2009: viii). Although this is a series of short introductory books, and therefore conventionally an inappropriate source for PhD level work perhaps, 'each book is written by a leading theatre scholar and represents the cutting edge of critical thinking in the discipline' (2009: viii). As this thesis is inter-disciplinary and considers performance from the perspectives of several substantive and complex subjects – 'queer theory', 'performance', 'politics', 'materiality' and 'desire' – the brief yet broad scope of these books have often offered a useful focus to the research.

^x Various queer theorists have investigated the problems that accompany the legitimating power of performative visibility. Diana Fuss has asked: 'How do we know when the homo is contributing to the confirmation of the hetero and when it is disturbing it?' (Fuss, 1991: 6). Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield explore a similar dynamic through what they call, respectively, 'the politics of containment' (Dollimore, 1991: 81-90) and the 'entrapment model' (Sinfield, 1994: 24).

^{xi} On this subject Helen Freshwater tells us: ‘their first action...focused upon Burroughs Wellcome, as they invaded the company’s Annual General Meeting at Park Lane’s Grosvenor House Hotel. The next protest was designed to publicise the Home Office’s refusal to fund research on drug taking and homosexuality in prisons’ (2009a: 111).

^{xii} Such strategies included staging ‘Kiss-ins’ and circulating representations of LGBTQ sexuality on construction sites, lampposts and billboards. For further discussion of the work of ACT UP and Queer Nation cf. *Theatre & Sexuality* (Dolan, 2009: 9-12); *Judith Butler* (Lloyd, 2007: 7-10) and *Theatre Censorship in Britain* (Freshwater, 2009a: 111-119).

^{xiii} Vows performed included:

We want the right to cherish each other and legally be each other’s next of kin...

We want the right to have and to hold anywhere in the world with full immigration rights

We want to love each other in sickness and in health with hospital visitation rights.

(Cited in Freshwater, 2009a: 113)

^{xiv} Freshwater reminds us that the relationship between Butler’s theories and political practice is not always straightforward:

It is, however, important to remember that Butler recognises the difficulty of working through the traumatic history carried by some terms, which may prove particularly resistant to this work of ‘reterritorialisation’. She also observes that the re-citation of reactionary terms does not necessarily result in progressive resignification, acknowledging that the ‘risk of renormalisation’ always exists.

(2009a: 114)

^{xv} Brecht’s aesthetic experimentation has been hugely influential in discussions of theatre and politics. In *Theatre & Ethics* (2009), Ridout argues that although Brecht’s work demonstrates a political commitment to Marxism, which places it firmly on the side of progress, it is also a ‘theatre that radically challenges the very structure of enlightenment thought, through an interest in process and openness much more regularly associated with the postmodern’ (2009: 46). To this end, he views *The Good Person of Szechwan* as a commentary on the uselessness of theatre as a site for ‘moral instruction’; rather, those seeking ethical catharsis and absolution from that institution should look to themselves. As we shall see, this seems in keeping with later theorists who have challenged the notion of ‘political theatre’ as a distinct genre of performance. For an investigation into the way Brecht’s work might be related to a politically ‘queer’ aesthetic cf. Elin Diamond’s ‘Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism’ (1997: 43-56) in which she investigates how Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation technique) might be applied to feminist performance theory.

^{xvi} In *Disidentification* (1999) Muñoz looks at how those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture, not by aligning themselves with or against exclusionary works, but rather by transforming these works for their own cultural purposes. Muñoz calls this process ‘disidentification’, a process which attempts to fashion a queer world by working on, with, and against dominant ideology.

^{xvii} There is a potential problem with this statement in the fact that the ‘we’ seems to imply a collective group, assuming a normative definition of ‘audience’. How might we consider one-on-one performances within this paradigm? Such performances formed the entire programme of a recent festival at the Battersea Arts Centre, July, 2011 (Websites: Battersea Arts Centre). Through Butler however, I would like to transform Ridout’s ‘we’ to signify how the spectator-

subject might become multiple through the experience of watching performance. It might be possible to become multiple subjectivities simultaneously and escape the trap of heteronormativity that performativity produces. If considered from these perspectives one-on-one performances, as well those seemingly described by Ridout, might also contain rich political potential.

^{xviii} The implicit essentialism in Butler's referral to the 'heart of ethics' betrays, possibly, her own recourse to 'belief' in her analysis.

^{xix} On this subject, Alan Read has argued that an academic focus on the political efficacy of theatre has suppressed questions that are concerned with 'ethics' and the understanding of the relationship between intimacy and engagement (2008: xi). This thesis engages with questions of 'intimacy' and 'ethics' but also relates them to the 'political' dimensions of performance.

^{xx} I believe it is possible to draw a direct link between the academic work inspired by the queer moments I have experienced in performance and the 'politics' of my own creative practice. In April/May 2010, my first full length Welsh-language play – *Llwyth* [tribe] (2010) – was produced by Sherman Cymru; an exploration of Welsh-language culture seen through the eyes of five gay men out on International Night in Cardiff. Reviewer Gareth Llyr Evans suggested this was the first consciously 'queer' Welsh-language production to be staged (2010). Roger Owen, in a retrospective of Welsh-language art in 2010, suggested that *Llwyth* 'revealed a new mythology with regards to Welshness, which is that Wales, in British and International terms, is a "queer" nation: marginalised and rejected by the (British) commercial mainstream, often invisible...it defined the national identity of the Welsh in theatrical terms' (Owen: 2010). Stephen Greer is writing on this subject in his forthcoming book on British queer performance, published by Palgrave Macmillan. In a paper delivered at the recent (2010) TAPRA conference at the University of Glamorgan he stated:

To be queer and Welsh (or Welsh and queer) seems to involve a continual process of negotiation, an ongoing act of translation ... the key to understanding the possibilities presented here may be the way in which James' play, I think, positions Welshness – linguistically, culturally, as a national identity – as a register for queerness, though the replacement of one for the other is not a simple dichotomy. The relationship between the two is discontinuous, fluid, plural. It permits points of contact, which are familiar and unfamiliar. There is space here for resistance, for a creative re-writing of known histories and geographies, for a making sense of oneself without leaving. It may provide for recognition and collaboration based on difference, rather than the claim on similarity of experience or desire. At the climax of *Llwyth*, Aneurin pushes away his Welshness, declares 'I can be who I want to be', Dada replies 'It's not just a matter of choice Aneurin. Enjoy the contradictions. Enjoy the mess.' There is, I think, a particularly valuable kind of recognition that is made possible here which is not built on symmetry, on discovery of likeness – but one based on shifting perspectives, on impossible and contradictory claims. I am/am not straight. I am/am not Welsh.

(Greer: 2010)

For me, such reactions to my practice, which gesture towards a wider social perspective, encourage me to believe that it is worth defending my seemingly subjective approach to performance analysis against any charges of solipsism. Potentially at least, I would like to imagine that the above responses to *Llwyth* indicate how engagement with performative experiences on a personal level might ultimately lead to a wider socio-political impact, which

travels beyond the limited personal influence of the initial queer moment. Obviously it is not within the scope of this thesis to validate such claims nor to examine the complexity and nuances of this relationship between theory and personal practice in detail, although as the conclusion of this thesis suggests, this points to a further avenue of research.

^{xxi} On April 3, 1895, at the Old Bailey, Oscar Wilde accused John Sholto Douglas, the Marquess of Queensberry, of libel. In an earlier incident the Marquess, angered by Wilde's relationship with his son Lord Alfred Douglas, had left a card with a porter at the Albermarle Club where Wilde and his wife were private members. On the card he had written "*To Oscar Wilde posing as a sodomite [sic]*". Wilde's failure to win the case led to a further two trials, this time with Wilde in the dock persecuted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which had been newly established in 1895. Together with Alfred Taylor, he now faced twenty-five counts of gross indecency and conspiracy to commit gross indecencies. Though the jury deliberated for over three hours they concluded that they could not reach a verdict on most of the charges. However, Wilde was successfully acquitted of those concerning acts of gross indecency with Frederick Atkins. On May 7th, Wilde was released on bail for three weeks before returning to the dock for a third trial, this time headed by England's top prosecutor: Solicitor-General Frank Lockwood. This time he was found guilty on all accounts except for those relating to Edward Shelley. Wilde was sentenced to two years in prison, the last eighteen months of which he spent in Reading Jail. For further information cf. H.M. Hyde's *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1948).

^{xxii} In *Sexual Dissidence* Jonathan Dollimore categorises the 'homosexual sensibility as that which connects between perversity and paradox' (1990: 309). William Turner, in *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, argues that 'queer theorists suspect that we live in a paradoxical world and that attention to the history and function of paradoxes, as opposed to denunciation of them as failures of logic or reason, is a highly productive enterprise, both intellectually and politically' (2000: 17).

Chapter 2

Lazlo Pearlman: the paradox of bodily autonomy

Introduction

This chapter explores how performance might reveal the performativity of the ontological categories of 'gender' and 'sex'. It is also concerned with the potential limitations of a deconstructive approach that exposes a body in performance primarily recognised in relation to language and the 'other'. This perspective would suggest that 'queer subjectivity' – a sense of a feeling body that exists beyond the chiasmus of materiality – is a utopian im/possibility¹: the subject can only mean through the hierarchical dualisms of language and representation. This chapter asks, however, if the organised field of representation and language always already constitutes the body-subject (this is the contradiction of bodily autonomy) how might performance produce a queer subject? That is to say, can performance produce a 'sense' of subjectivity that exists beside/beyond language and representation? In addressing these questions, I argue that the investigation of *contingent essentialism* is a process that analysis of live performance might usefully explore, and through which 'queer moments' might emerge. Through such queer moments I seek to make a connection between the excess of truths produced by the

¹ In discussing the work of artists such as Lloyd Newson and Nigel Charnock, Robin Griffiths argues that 'the queer perspective and aesthetic is explored more as a form of acknowledged utopian impossibility' (2022: 33). 'Utopian impossibility', however, is a tautology as utopias are, by definition, impossible places, according to Bammer's definition cited in the introduction (1991: 7). Queer moments, for me, are a way of acknowledging and yet, for an instant, producing the queer subject despite the impossibility of that result: body-subjects provisionally emerge simultaneously as living flesh and 'ghosts' beyond the hierarchical dualisms of language and representation.

paradoxes of performance and how a ghost of the queer subject might emerge in embodied practice.

Lazlo Pearlman

He Was a Sailor, The Sea Was Inside him, Sometimes There Were Storms was commissioned by the Drill Hall, London and performed there by Lazlo Pearlman in May 2007. According to its website, the Drill Hall 'champions the work of lesbian, gay and queer artists ... It is the number one London venue to see radical queer theatre and new work that plays with the politics of identity' (Websites: Drill Hall). Lazlo is a female to male (FTM) transgendered performance artist whose work is often inspired by his FTM transgendered experience². In an exploration of queer moments this seems like an appropriate place to begin as his performance offered an explicit engagement with gender performativity, as characterised by Judith Butler's queer project.

The performance was a solo performance piece³. Aesthetically combining direct audience-address with musical elements such as sea shanties, rousing musical interludes, Busby Berkely-style numbers and opera, not to mention its homage to surrealist cabaret and Camp, the show was a gender-bending extravaganza in which Lazlo played many parts. The piece might be considered as what performance scholar Michael Peterson calls a 'monopolylogue' (1997: 14), which, Jill Dolan

² As Lazlo is a personal friend I have decided to refer to him by his first name throughout this analysis.

³ For a further discussion of LGBTQ solo performances cf. *Theatre & Sexuality* (Dolan, 2010: 43-8).

suggests, explores the fluidity of cultural identities and offers ways for performers and spectators potentially to experience them (2005: 67)⁴.

It presented the story of Salty Bugger, a character literally and metaphorically 'lost at sea'⁵, caught between the binary order of gender classification. When I first entered the intimate space of Drill Hall 2, Salty was onstage trapped in an outsize duffle bag. He began by singing a sexually explicit a capella ballad that told us of 'the good ship Venus' and 'the frigging in the rigging' that happened upon it. Lazlo then transmogrified between Salty Bugger, who often referred to himself/herself/itself⁶ in the second person – 'How did you get here? Don't you remember?' – and the rather more confident cabaret persona of Madam Pierre who offered Salty her business card to chew to 'get the saliva going. When there's nothing to drink'. She then went on to warn Salty of the danger of scurvy before the dual narrators multiplied as Lazlo lip-synced, first to a pre-recorded voice of a Colonial lady bidding farewell to her native land, and second to the chief of Naval Operations who promised that the Navy would be extremely successful in the future due to 'a larger and more lethal fleet of faster ships'. A virtuosic display followed, as both narratives were inter-spliced and Lazlo's characterisation and mime between Salty Bugger and Madam Pierre switched at lightning speed. As a climax to this dualistic exploration, Lazlo

⁴ I will return to this concept in Chapter 5. To clarify, mono/polylogue perhaps better suggests its intended meaning and steers the reader away from the potential resonances and implications of 'monopoly'. Here the individualised 'subject' of Lazlo remains 'present' (mono) but yet is refracted through a multi-perspective collective of positions and narrators (mono/polylogue).

⁵ All quotations from the show are taken from an unpublished performance script, kindly sent to me by Lazlo after the performance.

⁶ As Lazlo generally refers to himself with masculine pronouns I will follow the same example (Websites: Pearlman).

suddenly exploded out of the duffle bag and his naked transgendered body was revealed: for a moment his vagina, and the scars of his mastectomy were on show. After a brief interlude where he seemed to be enjoying this moment of freedom, he covered himself with semaphore flags.

As the show continued so too did its exploration of gender in relation to language. For example, Lazlo at one point emerged as the eighteenth century Dutch pharmacist, zoologist and collector Albertus Seba who attempted to classify Salty as male or female but was ultimately confounded by the seeming contradictions of his body. There was also a witty exploration of the gendered classification system of French nouns that revealed its inherent contradictions: for example, its masculine vagina (*Le Vagin*) and feminine penis (*La bite*). These sequences of narrative were also variously interrupted by song: a rendition of Edith Piaf singing *Non, Je ne Regrette Rien*, an operatic lip-sync of a deep bass singing *Arise, ye Subterranean Winds* as a climactic storm ensued on stage (represented by strobe lighting) and the uplifting *Jackie* by Jacques Brel sung by Lazlo 'himself' to conclude the show.

Therefore through text and music, voice and body, mime and song, 'gender' and 'sex' were explored from a variety of perspectives. It was a performance that intended to explore 'the unknown in gender, and the tension of the moment before, during and after the storm of change' (Websites: Pearlman). Lazlo, it seems, successfully negotiated the dualisms of gender and survived the storm.

What can his performance tell us about the performativity of gender and sex? What contradictions might this reveal? What does his negotiation of multiplicity teach us about the queer potential of such contradictions? And finally, how is the 'tension of this moment' created in his performance and what might this expose about the political and profound potential of queer moments?

Performativity and Performance

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler develops her theory of performativity, which offers a critique of gender diamorphism. This critique interrogates the heteronormative matrix through which man/woman, masculine/feminine and hetero/homo are defined in hierarchical relation to each other. It makes evident how such dualisms produce further exclusions because alternative subjectivities are not culturally intelligible within this matrix. She also explores the process by which these dualisms of gender have become normalised 'performatively' through 'repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being' (1990: 43-44).

Chapter 1 has distinguished between Butlerian performativity and performance⁷.

'Performativity' is an aspect of theory with specific philosophical and linguistic underpinnings, which engages with how we might unconsciously adopt gendered

⁷ For further discussions on these topics cf. *Performativity and Performance* (Parker and Sedgwick, 1995). In their introduction the editors argue that the term 'performativity' has been renewed by the work of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, which has 'enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes' (1995: 1-2).

roles; 'performance', for the purpose of this thesis, is an environment within which the framing devices and structures might produce the necessary reflexive consciousness to gain insight into how performativity functions. Performativity and performance should not be confused, although they do still share theoretical connections. For example, Butler utilised performance tropes in her original explication of this theory in *Gender Trouble*. In that book she explored how male drag performance, with its hyperbolic re-presentation of femininity revealed its performative nature: through masquerade the presumed feminine original is also revealed as copy; mimetic re-presentation challenges the authenticity of origins and the exclusionary powers of the norms it produces. Similarly, Sue Ellen-Case extends this relation of performativity to queer performance from a lesbian-feminist perspective in her essay 'Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic' (Case, 2009), and her later reconsideration of the topic in 'Towards a Butch-Feminist Retro Future' (Case, 2009). Through analysing the presentation of the Butch-Femme relation in Split Britches' *Beauty and the Beast*, she similarly suggests, in the words of Butler, how 'categories like butch and femme were not copies of a more originary heterosexuality, but they showed how the so-called originals, men and women within the heterosexual frame, are similarly constructed, performatively established' (2004: 209).

Furthermore, as Sarah Salih points out, although Butler is careful to distinguish between performance and performativity in *Bodies that Matter*, she also asserts that 'theatre' provides crucial opportunities for queer politics (2002: 96): '[A]n important set of histories might be told in which the increasing politicization of theatricality for

queers is at stake' (Butler, 1993: 232). Her examples of such theatre includes cross-dressing, drag balls, street walking, butch femme-spectacles, kiss-ins by Queer Nation and drag performance benefits for AIDS.

The use of such performance tropes to explain performativity has sometimes led to its misinterpretation: gender, in its detachment from the notion of origin, becomes understood as something that is wilfully and *consciously* performed. Hence, Butler's 2004 reformulation of performativity in terms of doing/undoing, whilst still retaining its relation to performance, is careful to distinguish between the subject's sole authorship of gender, and gender as a result of complex discursive production. Thus it becomes:

... a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary. What I call my "own" gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself).

(2004: 1)

Thus she argues, gender is a continual 'doing' by which some subjects become 'undone'. Those who fail to align with social norms and to 'do' gender effectively – those who are culturally unintelligible and excluded from the heteronormative

paradigm – in some cases, do not survive⁸. For Butler, embodied ‘doing’ is performative, thus wrenching ‘performativity’ from its sole attachment to speech/language.

From this perspective, considering gender along the lines of masculine/feminine, man/woman and male/female becomes problematic because it forecloses the limits by which gendered subjects become culturally intelligible. Though gender may be understood as ‘the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes’ (Butler, 2004: 42), wherever possible its theoretical consideration should be kept apart from these binaries. Gender is more productively considered as movement rather than stasis – ‘whether one refers to “gender trouble” or “gender bending”, “transgender” or “cross-gender,” one is already suggesting that gender has a way of moving beyond that naturalized binary’ (Butler, 2004: 42). If this is the case, gender should be considered as transformation and as therefore potentially transformative.

Performing Transformation

Returning to Lazlo’s performance it is not difficult to see how it carried these dynamic potentials. His transgendered body in performance potentially offered ‘the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category of crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself’ (Garber, 1992: 17). It certainly produced a crisis of category

⁸ For example, consider the case of Brandon Teena, a trans-gendered man who was raped and murdered in Humboldt; later this case became the subject of the film *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999) directed by Kimberley Peirce and starring Hilary Swank.

for the taxonomic regulations of Albertus Seba, the Dutch pharmacist, zoologist and collector who makes an appearance in the show:

He now saw Salty: Impossible! He She It had to be classified! He she it wanted to be. But how? Cabinets, curiosities, oddities. Which cabinet did it fit? He, She. What fit in it with it? Morphology. One is an anomaly. Two is a class. Find the things he she it is the same as – bingo! Classification. More cabinets fulfilled. Go back to sea, to see. What are the rules of classification at sea? There have to be rules, methodology, a system. There always are (is).

(Pearlman, 2007)

Rebecca Schneider has explored the 'explicit body in performance' from a feminist perspective to reveal how performers 'use their bodies as the stages across which they re-enact social dramas and traumas that have arbitrated cultural differentiations between truth and illusion, reality and dream, fact and fantasy, natural and unnatural, essential and constructed' (1997: 7). Indeed, Lazlo's explicit body in performance – a traditional 'masculine' body confounded by the scars of his mastectomy and his female genitalia – traversed similar dualisms producing a notion of gender that is always in motion.

Some theorists have pointed out how this very transformation could be interpreted as representing an essentialist trajectory; claiming the transsexual subject as a queer symbol actually threatens the legitimacy aspired to through transformation (Prosser,

1998: 32; Halberstam, 2005: 51). However, Lazlo's exploration of transformation, from female to male, even if suggesting a notion of masculine primacy also reveals the performativity of that primacy. The assumption that Lazlo's transformation is a repudiation of femininity implies that as a woman Lazlo was in possession of such a thing as an authentic femininity, the authenticity of which his transformation denies.

As Jill Dolan writes about the time she experienced the explicit body of MTF performance artist Kate Bornstein, 'where do you locate gender on an altered body that bears the echo of its past?' (1993: 76). Gender is not a location, and as Bornstein's body also made evident, it can elude all efforts to fix it rigidly. As Salty points out through metaphor, gender like 'the sea is not a stop, it's not a destination, it's a water highway, a road, a way to get from here to there' (Pearlman, 2007). Gender is not a 'here' nor 'there', nor a place to get stuck on, but rather should be open to a continual remaking and transformation.

Contingent Essentialism

Simply presenting the idea of gender as transformation, however, either through writing or theatre does not necessarily produce queer moments. That is because such performances are potentially riddled with contradictions, which reproduce their own exclusions. For example, before Lazlo revealed his body to his audience, he remained for the first quarter of the performance trapped within an outsize duffle bag, with only his shaved head visible above the lining of its yellow cloth. Having introduced us to Salty Bugger and Madame Pierre, the seeming linear narrative was interrupted by what at first seemed a rather incongruous display of lip-syncing to the

voice of the colonial lady and the Admiral. First, Lazlo mimed and characterised the lady, who bade farewell to her native land as she began her journey with her husband to the 'wilds of Africa'. Then he silently mouthed the deep, resonant words of an Admiral addressing a Chairman and committee, who celebrated the present and future of his new charge: 'the navy cannot meet the threats of tomorrow by simply maintaining today's readiness and capabilities. Our adversaries will not rest. Our neighbours will not wait. Neither will we' (Pearlman, 2007).

The schizophrenic transmogrification that followed is indicated below through the inclusion of the original text and a purposefully heteronormative colour-code which I have superimposed to clarify how Lazlo switched between **the admiral** and **the lady**. In performance Lazlo used two differentiated physical gestures facing in alternate directions to characterise the change, which was of course also audible on the sound track:

Mr. Chairman, **the time draws nigh when I must bid adieu to the chief of Naval Operations, perhaps forever! The thought of it dampens my pride more than you can imagine. I am resolved to summon the larger and more lethal fleet of faster ships with the capacity to overmatch the reproach of my friends and relations. I am determined rather than being an encumbrance on them, to be combat-ready forward-deployed, rotational surge capable – lethal enough to deter any threat, defeat any foe and meet such fate as awaits me. Your friendship today is in great shape. I have ever**

flattered myself with being motivated, well trained and battle-tested. Our adversaries will not rest if it pleases him who determines all things. Neither will we.

(Pearlman, 2007)

This playful transit – backwards and forwards between vocal hyperbolic displays of masculinity and femininity – not only interrogated the performativity of gender, but also perhaps suggested how language will inevitably produce political contradictions. As Lazlo lip-synced, it strongly suggested that any performative exploration of gender as transformation cannot do so without recourse to linguistic dualisms.

Derrida's writing on Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' might help support this claim:

'Artaud knew that all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech.

Becomes a signification which I do not possess because it is a signification' (Derrida, 1978: 175). This suggests, as does Butler's theory of gender performativity, that in each moment of enunciation, each moment of doing, 'we' are already undone; 'our' agency is always already embedded in the social structuration within which the enunciation takes place.

From this perspective, Lazlo's trans-gendered lip-sync may be considered as a performative articulation of Derrida's 'stolen speech.' Lazlo does not speak with his own voice; he has 'stolen' the text, the words of others, yet he re-presents them as his own, whilst performatively indicating the artifice of this presentation through

miming. The gendered and racial subjugations of colonial discourse implicit in the 'original text' are also evident. What are these voices? Who do they belong to? Can we ever really own our voice? Lazlo, in articulating the notion of gender as transformation, does so through the voices of the subjected colonial lady and the oppressive Admiral. How is transformation possible without speaking through the voice of the other? Does transformation always necessitate its own exclusions? If so, does this mean that queer theory cannot be reconciled with embodied politics?

Such questions are contradictory political realities for those living under the regulatory jurisdiction of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Better known as the DSM – IV, this manual published by the American Psychiatric Association is in its fourth edition and covers all mental health disorders for both children and adults (Websites: AllPsych online). It diagnoses 'gender identity disorder', which means that submitting to the pathology of psychological discourse is the only way individuals can gain the certification needed to facilitate transition through medical and technical means (Butler, 2004: 75). Therefore, though the diagnosis can alleviate suffering, the pathologising move it enacts may reproduce and intensify this suffering. That is why 'under present and entrenched social conditions in which gender norms are still articulated in conventional ways, and departures from the norm regarded as suspect, autonomy remains a paradox' (Butler, 2004: 100).

To return to Lazlo's lip-syncing prior to the revelation of his transformed body: it seems to me that this sequence metaphorically re-produced the contradictory –

potentially paradoxical – process by which Lazlo’s transformation was made possible. Contingent essentialism might be understood as provisionally accepting essentialised ontological categories in order to critique them. From this perspective, Lazlo’s lip-sync may be understood as a performative paraphrase of how such processes might be politically necessary for queer-inflected political practice. Miming to the colonial lady and the Admiral’s hyperbolic representations of essentialised gender, Lazlo may be seen as offering a performative translation of the following passage by Butler:

The only way to secure the means by which to start this transformation is by learning how to present yourself in a discourse that is not yours, a discourse that effaces you in the act of representing you, a discourse that denies the language you might want to use to describe who you are, how you got here, and what you want from this life.

(2004: 91)

This is important because in my subsequent analyses queer moments in performance will emerge paradoxically in relation to such contradictions and the processes through which they are negotiated.

Lazlo and the Contradictions of Bodily Autonomy

After the revelation of his explicit body Salty, echoing a similar moment in the Genesis myth, became embarrassed. To protect his modesty he found a pair of flags

to cover his genitalia. This action initiated a playful opportunity for Salty who began conducting a semaphore flag-signalling dance to the sound of Cab Callaway singing *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*; however, each time Lazlo/Salty changed the position to create another signal, he always ensured that one of the flags concealed his vagina. Through drawing attention to a system of signals in relation to the body, this sequence perhaps offered another performative exploration of the contradictions of bodily autonomy.

To repeat Butler's formulation: 'to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, "one's own," that over which we must claim rights of autonomy' (2004: 20). Bodily autonomy is contradictory; the feeling body is mostly recognised through language and representation. This complicated relation of language and the body is its 'chiasmus', in that it is almost impossible to separate their mutual interdependency in the ways through which knowledge about the body is produced. This interpretation of the body by Butler is dependent on an engagement and critique of Lacan's notion of the symbolic. In Elizabeth Wright's words, the symbolic is the 'pre-existing order of language and law which forms the ground for the emergence of the subject' (Wright, 2000:74). Chiasmic materiality also engages with a notion of the Real, which in Lacanian parlance indicates that which cannot be represented within the symbolic structures of binary difference: that which is not culturally intelligible and troubles the regulatory laws of linguistic discourse. This would seem to strongly imply that presenting queer subjectivity through embodied live performers is impossible: on the level of the symbolic, the performer is always already embedded in the hierarchical, organisational field of

language; and the Real – that which troubles the structure of that order – is unrepresentable. If that is the case, how might live performance produce what is essentially the unrepresentable queer subject?

Derrida, in his reading of Artaud, explores how the body in performance cannot escape the hierarchical structures of language:

Organization is articulation, the interlocking of functions or of members, the labor and play of differentiation. This constitutes both the “membering” and dismembering of my proper body. For one and the same reason, through a single gesture, Artaud is as fearful of the articulated body as he is of articulated language, as fearful of the member as of the word. For articulation is the structure of my body, and structure is always a structure of expropriation.

(1978: 186)

The contradictions of bodily autonomy mean that, in Butler’s terms, one’s body is undone as soon as it is done, dismembered by membering, expropriated through articulation. Lazlo’s use of the semaphore signalling system in relation to his transformed body may also be interpreted as a queer interrogation of these contradictions; it might serve as a reminder that language/discourse is always already present: the feeling body is primarily recognised ‘through’ a system of signs. In the accompanying track we heard Cab Callaway singing of being caught ‘in

between the devil and the deep blue sea', as Lazlo awkwardly attempted simultaneously to signal and cover his genitalia. Through this sequence, it seemed to me that Lazlo's subjectivity was also caught 'in-between' the contradictions of bodily autonomy: between a 'feeling' body – an 'excess' – and a chiasmic materiality ('my body is and is not mine' (Butler, 2004: 21)). The flags 'signalled' the structures of language and representation through which the body-subject is recognised.

If we consider again the moment before the revelation: Lazlo stood in a duffle bag, with only his shaved head and, at times, his muscular arms visible – his head and arms might be considered as a synecdoche which signalled 'masculinity'. His subsequent disrobing confounded expectation because what existed beneath was a body that eluded the signification originally afforded it: its gender could not be located so easily upon the body; the synecdoche of 'masculine' head and arms could not represent the elusive whole. The sign was suddenly unstable, as that which was excluded from the referent was now simultaneously present: 'feminine' and 'masculine' were concurrently embodied. Furthermore, I found myself questioning the stability of those categories through the constant slippage of 'meaning' which was reproduced throughout this presentation: was/is Lazlo 'male' or 'female'?

In attempting to hide his vagina from view with the semaphore flags, Lazlo reminded me that the dualisms which exist within signalling systems, representations and language operate on a hierarchical basis, but those hierarchies are inherently contradictory even as they are mutually dependent on each other. In this case, that which was read as a signal for femininity – the vagina – was persistently present

under the masking of the semaphore flag: masculinity/femininity were revealed as a deeply problematic binary, and the heteronormative matrix of gender rendered deeply unstable.

But whilst this sequence might be interpreted as a performative engagement with deconstruction, it also appeared to confirm the seemingly immutable fact that the contradiction of bodily autonomy always remains. For whilst the sequence perhaps acknowledged the instability of male/female and masculinity/femininity, this interpretation of the body is still dependent on the frame of these linguistic binaries, with all their hierarchies and exclusions.

Beyond Paralysis: contradictions and paradox

So far this analysis has suggested that Lazlo's performance enacted an interrogation of gender and sexual difference. Through doing so it highlighted the necessity of contingent essentialism, and how it is difficult to operate politically without dualisms. It might be easy to conclude at this point that such contradictions unveiled by a deconstructive approach offer a theoretical paralysis, which confounds the dynamic movement of transformation. Indeed, deconstructive logic might seem pointlessly circular, potentially leading to a theoretical stalemate: doomed to speak through the voice of the other, doomed to enact through a body already claimed by discourse, queer performance becomes politically and performatively thwartedⁱ (*aside*).

This is where the deconstructive logic of 'queer theory' might encourage a mode of double-edged thinking that could lead to unproductive circumlocution. Teresa de Lauretis, who first coined the term, had identified deconstruction as its methodology: 'queer theory' represented the 'critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences' (de Lauretis, 1991: iv). Similarly, deconstruction emerged as an important and influential methodology for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Her *Epistemology of the Closet*, which is often considered along with Butler's *Gender Trouble* as one of the (anti-)discipline's 'foundational' texts (Gauntlett, 2002: 135; Spargo, 2000: 48), explicates that 'one main strand of argument in this book is deconstructive, in a fairly specific sense' (1990: 10). The problem with this methodology is that it can lead to what Stephen Greer calls the 'tighter and tighter circles of introspection' (2006: 221): the circular dynamic by which the representation of gender, for instance, is always already caught in a mimetic dance of origin and copy; where neither is primary, but the discursive choreography ensures that one must always take the lead in its dizzying waltzⁱⁱ (*aside*). Rather than conceding to the foreclosing constraints of my metaphor, performance might offer an opportunity to evolve this logic into something productive, and attempt to turn such performative and political paralysis into profound 'queer' moments of political transformation. Lazlo's work allows us to begin exploring the way performance might actively and reflexively engage with these contradictions, through transforming such contradictions into performative paradoxes.

A Queer Moment: a paradox of performance

The moment Lazlo revealed his explicit body in performance it re-presented gender as a question, interrogating the prevailing binary system within which we might have previously placed our interpretation of his body as a sign. In this moment, Lazlo was simultaneously 'masculine' and 'feminine', 'male' and 'female' and in occupying both, rendered such categorisations illogical. This produced a visual contradiction that negotiated the 'gender' and 'sex' dualisms of his performance, so that both 'masculinity' and 'femininity', 'male' and 'feminine' were concurrently re-presented the moment his body exploded out of the duffle bag. But Lazlo's subjectivity cannot be contained within the binary structures through which he/she⁹ might be recognised. For an instant perhaps, Lazlo emerged at the limits of cultural intelligibility; as soon as I attempted to 'grasp' his body through discourse I was confounded by the way it shifted the field of signification. Gender, rather than adhering to the stasis of a naturalised binary, continually shifted across/between these dualisms. The performance of masculinity would simultaneously perform a feminine 'identity'; his 'female' form would suddenly emerge as 'male'. Perhaps I might even reframe these seeming contradictions as paradox: *performing masculinity becomes a feminine act*ⁱⁱⁱ (*aside*).

Did I experience a queer moment here? In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler explores the case of David Reimer in ways that might offer some answers to this question. Reimer was determined by medics to be a boy at birth. At the age of eight months he was operated upon to rectify a case of phimosis, a condition that impedes

⁹ This is to accommodate the shift, which happened for me in this moment.

urination. During the operation his penis was accidentally severed and badly burnt and as a consequence, his parents initiated a sexual reassignment surgery. He was then raised as a girl, Brenda, but then, during his teenage years, decided to become a man. As they progressed, David's transitions became, first, a case study used to argue for the social constructionism of gender and then, second, a testimony of essentialism: through becoming a man again he was returning to the biological destiny governed by his XY chromosomes. Butler argues, however, that rather than viewing the case in these terms it might be more productively considered as an example of how subjectivity is defined by a matrix of normalisation. As a girl, David was continually scrutinised, compared by a plurality of psychological and medical gazes to ideas of the norm. Moreover, in medical and psychological discourses the inevitable comparative question was constantly raised: how well is this person 'doing' femininity?

In terms of queer moments, this case becomes significant when David challenges the normalising discourse by which he had been explicitly governed throughout his life. In recalling how doctors warned him that FTM surgery would render his life problematic he offered this response:

It dawned on me that these people gotta be pretty shallow if that's the only thing they think I've got going for me; that the only reason why people get married and have children and have a productive life is because of what they have between their legs... If that's all

they think of me, that they justify my worth by what I have between my legs, then I gotta be a complete loser.

(Butler, 2004: 71)

For Butler, this is an extremely powerful moment of enunciation as it means that David's 'worth', his significance and his demand for recognition – to be made culturally intelligible – happens through his critique of the limits of language. She argues that David articulates an:

... incommensurability between who he is and what he has, an incommensurability between the phallus he has and what it is expected to be (and in this way no different to anyone with a phallus), which means that he has not become one with the norm, and yet he is still someone, speaking, insisting, even referring to himself.

(2004: 72)

His 'worth' is greater than that which can be represented through language and yet he articulates a sense of that worth through language. He galvanises and reverses the terms of regulation in order to escape them; he positions himself in relation to the norm and yet aims to evade assimilation. David for a moment here, potentially, emerges as a queer subject, at the edge of cultural intelligibility.

For me, Lazlo, through his/her performance, produces a similar moment. His body becomes a powerful paradox in performance, precisely because of the context of its revelation. When he is in the duffle bag one is invited to produce a reductive interpretation of gender, and yet his escape from – which of course still maintains a relation to – the limitations of the duffle bag, may reveal a *ghost* of an idea, the idea of gender *per se*, which exceeds the limitations of their norms. His audience might understand this without grasping it literally – i.e. as some kind of absence/lacuna – but the queer subject appears resplendent nevertheless. Lazlo's body exists in excess of the dualisms that have negotiated its emergence; his/her 'worth' is also greater. Through this he provides a glimpse of a materiality that exists beside/beyond language and representation – the feeling body – so that the contradictions of bodily autonomy are rendered as paradox: *an embodied text that speaks its own silence*. Because this queer event provisionally suggests a body beside/beyond language and representation, I characterise such moments of subjectivity as presenting the *ghost of the queer subject*: it fails to fully materialise although its absence is indicated by a tangible presence.

Like David, in this moment Lazlo:

...does not precisely occupy a new world, since he is still, even within the syntax which brings about his "I," still positioned somewhere between the norm and failure. And he is, finally, neither one; he is the human in its anonymity, as that which we do not yet know how to name or that which sets a limits on all naming.

And in that sense, he is the anonymous – and critical – condition of the human as it speaks itself at the limits of what we think we know.

(2004:74)

This project is a search for those moments in performance, which produce a similar sense of the human: a human we do not know and yet speaks itself at the limits of what we think we know. But what is more, rather than leaving such rare instances at the level of interpretation, I am also looking for those moments which have the potential to transform the spectator, in relation to the performer and possibly others within that environment, in a profound way.

‘Reading’ Performance: theory and practice

What has been presented here might be regarded as a queer ‘reading’. This ‘reading’ of the body as ‘text’ is proposed in order to make a distinction between this current interpretation and that which I am searching for in terms of queer moments; to suggest a gap, a lack, an incommensurability between my material experience, my representation of this performance, and my desire to identify queer moments as transformative and profound. Though that perhaps moves me closer towards the queer moments I believe I experienced in *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*, it also somehow falls short of that experience.

Why might this be? Lesley Ferris in her introduction to *Cross-Dressing the Stage* (1993) engages with Roland Barthes’ distinction between readerly/writerly texts.

Readerly texts mask their ideological production and writerly texts turn their readers into producers of meaning, implicating them in the process of interpreting the shifting signifiers, making explicit the way discourse produces meaning. In this sense, they perform their own deconstruction; a writerly text might potentially be a queer text. Ferris employs this term in support of what she calls 'transvestite theatre', and argues that cross-dressing in performance 'is an exemplary source of the writerly text, a work that forces the reader/spectator to see multiple meanings in the very act of reading itself, of listening, watching a performance' (1993: 8). Shifting the perspective from cross-dressing to transsexuality, did Lazlo's performance offer an experience of the writerly text in his own mode of 'transsexual theatre'?

Referring to a performance as a writerly text, however, illuminates what I think might be an issue for the application of theory to performance in general; that is to say, it becomes a practice to be 'read': the performance (and the body) as text is engaged with through the language of queer discourse. So whilst I can argue that the performance interrogates gender and sexuality and momentarily produces a ghost of the queer subject, the interpretation offered by this interrogation is possibly only culturally intelligible through the interpretive framework of academic discourse. This leads me to question what the limits might be of such queer theory/practice and how it stages its own exclusions.

How was Lazlo's lip-synching as a presentation of contingent essentialism recognised by me? How was the semaphore dance as an exploration of the contradictions of bodily autonomy made intelligible to me? By his own admission (in an interview I

conducted after the performance), the lip-syncing sequence was merely included as homage to the 'delicious gay trope' of miming, any relations it had to such queer interpretations were purely accidental. My interpretation becomes *known* to me through the theory I have learnt to apply; it is made intelligible through this specific language of analysis. I do not raise these issues of theory to diminish the value of 'reading'. It is crucial not only to proliferate texts/images/representations so that the limits of cultural intelligibility may be extended, but also, as Dolan argues with reference to Peggy Phelan, to encourage variant 'ways to read them' (2001: 39).

I wish to argue, however, that accounts that 'read' – i.e. interpret performance as writerly texts – offer a limited insight into the epistemology of human performance, as they do not necessarily consider why and how embodied knowledge/experience might *feel*. A variety of approaches to performance are needed to investigate the 'nature' of such encounters; that is to say, how queer moments may be produced and how they might *touch* the spectator, not merely through 'reading' and 'interpretation' but through modes of embodied exchange/interaction. So my primary question still stands: how might queer moments, which produce queer subjects, transform *both* performer and spectator politically in a profound way?

ⁱ In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida claims:

As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the spectre. Herein lies perhaps, among so many others, an indelible lesson of Marxism. There is no longer, there has never been a scholar capable of speaking anything and everything while addressing himself to everyone and anyone, and especially to ghosts. There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts – nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being ('to be or not to be,' in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity.

(1994: 11-2)

This passage, and the book as a whole, might suggest that being able to bear witness is in itself profoundly responsible and does not indicate a sense of 'paralysis' or pointless circularity. In relation to this passage, I view 'myself' as a scholar who deals with ghosts; however, rather than representing a distinction between 'the real and the unreal ... being and non-being', the ghost of the queer subject is 'proof' of the (excess of) 'truths' that problematise these binary distinctions. They become resistant/transformational spectres, which might offer an alternative perspective/s on the potential 'paralysis' which emerges, as I see it, when performance is viewed dualistically.

ⁱⁱ In his essay 'Just be Yourself' (2002), Philip Auslander effectively addresses the issue of 'circumlocution' in relation to deconstruction and performance. His engagement with the issue begins by noting Jacques Derrida's response to acknowledging the loss or 'impossible presence of the absent origin' (1978: 292). One hypothetical response is a negative one, which 'dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign' (1978: 292), the other is what Derrida describes as the response 'which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of the being who ... throughout his entire history, has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the play' (1978: 292). Relating this to performance Auslander argues that: '[a]cting, like any form of "writing," can express the two responses Derrida mentions: the actor can either hanker after presence or indulge in play which affirms the interdeterminacy of meaning' (Auslander, 2002: 59). Derrida attempts to achieve play (which affirms such interdeterminacy) in his writing through coining some terms to refer to conceptual non-entities (e.g. an effect I am trying to achieve through the ghost of the queer subject) and crossing out others to indicate 'the inescapable use of terms the validity of which he denies' (Auslander, 2002: 59). Auslander makes a link between the practice of 'writing under erasure', which uses language bound up in the metaphysics of presence and crosses it out, with how performance might simultaneously use the vocabularies of conventional acting methods and styles to undermine them. For example, he notes that in *Paradoxes sur le comédien* (Diderot, 1970: 168) Diderot describes how David Garrick would place his head between folding doors and demonstrate a whole range of facial expressions associated with particular emotions. Garrick's performance was a gratuitous demonstration of pure signification, not grounded in

any meaning. To what extent such a game can create a satisfying performance is, as Auslander notes, a matter of opinion. In investigating the relationship between profundity and deconstruction this thesis argues that performance can be both deconstructive and 'satisfying'.

ⁱⁱⁱ This has proved to be an incredibly difficult paradox to formulate, probably because male/female and masculinity/femininity are such powerful binaries, which structure (at least) so many Western languages and social rules. The term 'becoming' in this formulation, with all its multiple connotations, hopefully works to deconstruct the implicit hierarchies perpetuated by these dualisms.

Chapter 3

Franko B: radical intimacy and the 'punctum' of performance

Introduction

In this chapter I am interested in how the momentary appearance of the queer subject might potentially transform the spectator in a way that is profound and inclusive of the other. How might we move further beyond the notion that performance and its representations are *always* mediated through language and the binary exclusions this necessitates? How might the feeling body in performance, that exists beside/beyond representation, touch the spectator in a profound way?

The chapter will analyse performances by visual artist Franko B: *I'm Not Your Babe* (1996), *I Miss You* (2003) and *Aktion 893 (Why Are You Here?)* (2005). These are not performances I witnessed as 'live' events; I experienced them as mediated through video documentary footage and accounts by academics and critics who saw the events live. This strategy may at first seem problematic as it subtracts the qualities of the 'live' event that my accounts of queer moments have so far depended upon. This, however, is part of my critical methodology as it deliberately raises the stakes on issues of language/representation in relation to the feeling body.

As my thesis argues that it is possible to experience a feeling body in performance *despite* the dualisms of language and representation, this chapter introduces a set of meta-discourses (film and textual analysis) to test this theory. If it is possible to gain a sense of queer moments through performances mediated by documentary footage

and secondary perspectives, then this methodology might illuminate the potential for experiencing the feeling body despite its mediation through the discourses of language/representation which haunt live performance. This 'double mediation' of Franko B's performances through video and critical analysis reproduces the 'gap' between the feeling body and language/representation.

Therefore, I will consider these doubly mediated performances by Franko B from the perspective of chiasmic materiality and its relationship to the feeling body. From the perspective of chiasmic materiality, I will argue that these performances potentially explored the limits of representation through the contradictions of the artist's culturally materialised subjectivity. That is to say, they interrogated how bodily autonomy is always primarily trapped within the representational frame of language: i.e. how the body comes to 'mean' predominantly through language in relation to the other. This was achieved, I will suggest, through the way Franko B attempted to produce a reflexive *intersubjective environment* for spectators by engaging with the themes of control, language and materiality. I will explore how such environments make explicit the spectators' relation to the performing subject and how 'Franko B's' subjectivity is constructed through this relation. The intention of this analysis is to demonstrate further how language and representation limits queer subjectivity.

Despite this, however, I will also argue that Franko B's performance of *I Miss You* (2003) potentially produced a sense of the feeling body beside/beyond the limits of representation. A 'secondary' scholarly/critical perspective will be provided by Amelia Jones' account of subjectivity in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998),

especially through her analysis of that performance in “‘Corporeal Malediction’: Franko B’s Body/Art and the Trace of Whiteness’ (Websites: Jones)¹. As I was not present at the event and am interpreting Jones’ analysis, the ‘queer moment’ investigated in this chapter must of course remain hypothetical. Such speculation, however, is an important part of my argument. Through following up on Jones’ critical insights, this chapter provides the next stage in preparing the reader for how they might ‘read’/experience the performative writing in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 2 I investigated how Lazlo Pearlman rendered the contradictions of bodily autonomy as paradox. I argued that he momentarily produced a performative paradox – *an embodied text that speaks its own silence* – that ‘enunciated’ a materiality beyond words. This chapter will analyse the shift that might happen in performance should the paradox of bodily autonomy touch and transform both performer and spectator. How might that paradox produce a queer moment?

Porous Boundaries

As I watch the documentary footage of *I’m Not Your Babe* (1996), Franko B is shown standing naked on a white canvas². He is also painted completely white and blood drains from two catheters in his wrists. As he bleeds, he is surrounded by mist produced by dry ice; the red of his blood is a highly visible contrast as it seeps from his wounds onto both body and floor. The performance progresses – a compelling and repulsive spectacle – as Franko kneels, then eventually lies in his own blood, as it

¹ This critical essay has also been published in *Franko B: Blinded by Love* (Johnson, 2006).

² The documentary presents this part of the performance through one single shot, filmed from above. After approximately 10 minutes, he kneels (Websites: *I’m Not Your Babe*).

leaves its imprint on his flesh³. To end the performance, three men in clinically white suits enter the performance space and bind Franko's feet. He is attached to a hook and is winched up from his position on the ground. Hanging upside down from his bound feet, he extends his arms beyond his head and they reach towards the floor. He opens his body outwards, arms and hands outstretched horizontally (almost in a cruciform shape) in a gesture of symbolic sacrifice, whilst bleeding continually.

Similarly, *I Miss You* (2003) involves a spectacle of bloodshed. In the crowd-filled Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, Franko B appears at the end of a long white catwalk, again naked and painted white and bleeding from two catheters in his arms⁴. He begins to walk down the catwalk, his dripping blood tracing the steps of his journey. As he returns, his feet produce bloody imprints. He traverses the catwalk several times, his continual bleeding saturating the walkway, the traces of his feet leaving multiple patterns. He appears composed; his walk is unhurried. After what seems like another routine traversal, he disappears behind a screen; the bloodied walkway remains lit.

Franko B has suggested that the 'core' of his art is about creating a beautiful image and being in control (Websites: Franko B). He exercises 'control' through managing

³ The documentary is edited so that we do not see this progression. I, however, gain the sense that some time has passed between both shots due to the increased amount of blood on the canvas. The finale was filmed at a different performance altogether. The camera has now changed positions, directly faces Franko B and moves to follow the action.

⁴ Here the film alternates between two separate shots, each from opposite ends of the catwalk. The film lasts five minutes but is often edited so that Franko B's traversal of the catwalk is not seen in its entirety. Cf. (Websites: *I Miss You*).

his bleeding (both through the speed of its flow and the duration of the performance). Yet Monica Trigona observes that his blood 'is nothing but life, departing life, spurting from inflicted wounds, metaphors of the external limits, and therefore living inside each of us' (Websites: Trigona). Despite the actual 'external limits' of his flesh, Franko B. has also described his body in performance as an 'unmediated site for representation of the sacred, the beautiful, the untouchable, the unspeakable' (Websites: Franko B); that is to say, a way of dealing with that which exceeds the limits of representation as part of an 'unmediated site'. Furthermore, in contrast to his emphasis on the theme of control, he also describes his performances in terms of liberation: 'I activate a process of purification, which implies complete self-liberation, in my search for freedom. When I perform I feel free. It is an emotional process because in the end I feel I've totally evaded my neuroses, that I've completely donated myself with my gestures' (Websites: Trigona).

From these perspectives – of control and liberation – Franko B's blood-letting performances appear to deal with bodily autonomy through negotiating contradictory phenomena: the limits of representation and that which exceeds representation, the 'unmediated'. Through control he negotiates a process of liberation: a process that he claims is, for him, transformative. What does the possibility that this transformation takes place in relation to others tell us about queer moments in performance? If Franko B experiences the process of performance as a transformative event, how might such transformation relate to those witnessing the spectacle?

Queer Subjects: control, limits and excesses

For me, the video of *I'm Not Your Babe* serves to open up a reflexive disjuncture between the title of the performance and the body in (re)presentation, drawing attention to a contradiction between the title's linguistic claim for autonomy and the mediated metaphors of theatrical representation⁵. Can Franko B authentically claim bodily autonomy when the notion of such autonomy generally is interpreted through language/mediation and in relation to the other? So whilst the precarious self-controlling of his own blood – in the sense that in performance he has to judge when best to end the performance – may produce a strong sense of agency, the limitations of agency might be made explicit through the performance in relation to words. The performance may be in silence, but even so, the meaning of the performance is potentially refracted through language, especially through its title. Of course, the title is not necessarily in play for all spectators, just as language does not necessarily operate in the same way for all who witness the performance. Here the title – '*I'm Not Your Babe*' – becomes a performative trope for the way performances are *more than likely* mediated through language. For the majority, Franko B cannot escape language; his claim for bodily autonomy is made in relation to the other: here is a body that is, and is not, his. Despite asserting autonomy he must do so in relation to those who witness him: he *is* the other's babe.

This seems most pronounced in the final image of the bound and hanging upside-down body, which demonstrates the implications of Butler's contradictions of bodily

⁵ For further discussions on this work and his work in general cf. *Franko B* (Keidan, Morgan and Sinclair: 1998) and *Franko B* (Vason, Gray and Wilson, 2001).

autonomy through visual metaphor. The production's title claims his body is not 'mine' as a member of the audience and yet he *is* bound to the situation; with his feet tied and attached to a hook, his body cannot escape my gaze. We might usefully consider this image as a metaphor for how the body is nearly always already ensnared in the representational frame of performance. This returns us to Derrida's engagement with Artaud as explored in the last chapter, and his account of how bodies are always already mediated through language.

From the perspective of my thesis, Franko B's body mediated by video becomes a means of interrogating how language can diminish the capacity for bodily autonomy; the limitations of representation constrain the potential for agency. This is what Barbara Freedman identifies as the paradox of avant-garde theatre: 'in seeking to stage a moment outside of representation one cannot evade the play of gazes that constitutes representation' (1996: 99). Strictly speaking however, this situation is not rendered as paradoxical by Freedman, but rather stated as a contradiction: the component opposites of the sentence seem to cancel each other out, producing a sense of 'paralysis' for avant-garde theatre, perhaps⁶. What I am interested in here, is how paradoxes might produce the transformations of queer moments? How do Franko B's performances – both live and on video – travel beyond the limitations of these contradictions.

⁶ Arguably this 'paralysis' only exists, or is only produced, if one views performance as *potentially* transformative which, of course, I do.

So far my discussion of subjectivity has focused on the conflict that lies between autonomy and control in relation to the limits of language and representation. For Franko B, however, his body in performance mediates the untouchable and unrepresentable, an effect that is emphasised by video reproduction apparently further 'opening the gap' between these two qualitiesⁱ (*aside*); that is to say, that which *exceeds* language and representation in whatever other medium. If performance is always already negotiated through language and representation, how is this possible? I am reminded here of Jean-François Lyotard's essay 'What is Postmodernism?', in which he considers the sublime and equates it to the unrepresentable. He suggests that the concern of modern art is 'to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists. To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible' (1984: 78).

Lyotard further develops his notion of the sublime in *The Inhuman* (1991), which is analysed by Jacques Rancière in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009):

Where the art of the beautiful imposes form on matter, an art of the sublime consists in approaching matter, 'approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation' (Lyotard, 1991: 139). The issue at hand, then, concerns sensuous matter in its very alterity. How to conceive that alterity? ... Lyotard gives this irreducible material difference an unexpected name: he calls it 'immateriality'.

(2009: 90-91)

It is this 'immateriality' that I am attempting to conjure up through the ghost of the queer subject but, rather than suggesting that performance merely 'presents the fact that the unrepresentable exists', my thesis argues that queer moments are a way of experiencing the unrepresentable.

Queer moments thus share an affinity with the Lyotardian sublime. As the last chapter demonstrated, Butler argues that individual bodily autonomy is always dependent on conditions that cannot be authored at will, and yet there are still potentially moments of enunciation which radically rupture the limitations of these conditions. With regard to Franko B, Amelia Jones argues that his work is 'a queer deformation of the social contract of gender, race, and sexuality that positions us as subjects in the world' (Websites: Jones) . That is to say, although in Franko B's performances the body-subject is interpellated in relation to the other and through the languages that govern gender, race and sexuality, those performances have the capacity to momentarily rupture these relations and potentially allow his spectators to 'be witnesses to the unrepresentable'.

Queer Moments: the 'punctum' of performance

In the following passage Jones describes her experience of witnessing Franko B's performance of *I Miss You* (2003):

When I stand, shifting from one foot to the other in the crowd-filled
roaring silence of Tate Modern's turbine hall watching Franko B's

white body, in *I Miss You* (2003), traverse an increasingly bloodied catwalk (his feet stick to the blood after the first traversal, making a strange snapping, sucking sound as he extricates them), I am both definitively separated from his 'present', live body (which, after all, is staged like the objectified bodies in a fashion show, their agency evacuated by their production as fetishes 'over there', rendering the models 'absent' subjects), and absorbed into its inexorable, brute 'thereness' (the suck of his feet on the bloodied canvas is my punctum, opening his body to me as receptacle for my desperate projections of my own status as alive).

(Webites: Jones)

For her, this instance of synesthesia is akin to what Roland Barthes describes as a *punctum* in photographic representation. It is 'an accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (2000: 27). As Barthes suggests, the punctum is also something that exceeds language: 'what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance' (2000: 51). For Jones, there is a 'violence' to the punctum she experiences in Franko B's performance:

I use [punctum] deliberately because it speaks to the way in which Franko B's body is simultaneously 'live' and 'representational': both 'present' and, as noted, signalling of its own inevitable 'absence' ... The violence of the punctum, signaled by Barthes' use of terms such

as ‘cut’ and, elsewhere, ‘prick’ and ‘annihilation’, is the violence of the threat of mortality which haunts our every move.

(Websites: Jones)

Jones, it seems, is drawing attention to how a moment in performance – the suck of Franko B’s bloodied feet on the canvas – has the capacity to ‘bruise’ her through the unrepresentable, a sense of something beyond languageⁱⁱ (*aside*). It seems, from her description, that Franko B communicated a sense of his/her⁷ chiasmic materiality to Jones, and his/her feeling body beside/beyond it: a visceral imaging, perhapsⁱⁱⁱ (*aside*).

Indeed, in an interview with Gray Watson, Franko B describes his experience of this performance as a form of ‘bridging’:

FB: Bridging is to make contact. Bridging is when somebody else makes a connection with what I do. Not necessarily understand what I do. In the sense of “Oh. I understand what your work is about”. But when they make contact ... It’s not about getting what I mean or about the sort of contact you can make with verbal language.

(Vason, Watson and Wilson, 2001: unpaginated)

⁷ Note the pronouns here refer to both Franko B and Amelia Jones.

It seems to me that Franko B is describing something akin to Butler's paradoxical formulation of the Levinasian face as described in Chapter 1: 'it is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation here' (2006: 134).

In attempting to communicate this paradoxical moment Jones quotes a passage by Derrida from *Speech and Phenomena*, in which he states:

As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception, in the zone of primordially common to primordial impression and primordial retention, we admit the other into the self-identity of the Augenblick; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into the blink of the instant. There is a duration to the blink, and it closes the eye. This alterity is in fact the condition for presence, presentation, and thus for *Vorstellung* in general.

(Websites: Jones)

As his work here engages with the German philosopher Husserl, he chooses not to translate certain words. My consultation of the Oxford-Duden German dictionary revealed that this produces an interesting effect, especially in the context of this discussion. In using 'augenblick' Derrida is also talking about 'moment' (2005: 71): its three syllables in the German pronunciation have arguably a longer duration than that which the word signifies; in effect, the utterance alludes to an excess of

meaning. 'Vorstellung' can be translated variously, with definitions including 'idea' and 'picture', but most importantly for this argument, it can also mean 'presentation' and 'performance' (2005: 791). It follows that presentation and performance are haunted by the ghost of the unrepresentable – nonpresence – and there is, a possibility at least, for the two to exist simultaneously in a blink of an eye, or a queer moment. Furthermore, such moments are durational. This might suggest that queer moments may have a further duration, which exceeds their perceived limitation.

Jones argues that Franko B's practice points to 'the way in which, as Derrida indicates in the quotation above, the duration of the blink of an eye introduces "nonpresence" and thus alterity into the subject' (Websites: Jones). In Chapter 2, I argued that Butler's account of David Reimer's enunciation of self-worth, as something beyond 'what I have between my legs' (Butler, 2004: 71), suggested how queer subjects might emerge at the edge of cultural intelligibility to imply a 'worth' that is greater than language. In light of this, the revelation of Lazlo's body as he emerged from the duffle bag suggested that *performing masculinity becomes a feminine act*, and vice versa, simultaneously. Thus performance carries with it the potential to negotiate the contradictions made apparent through Butler's notion of gender performativity. As these contradictions appear simultaneously as a paradox – that is to say, as a formulation whose excesses may always exceed interpretative closure – what emerges is a human that we cannot know just through language, and yet 'speaks' itself at the limits of what we think we know. In a similar way, it seems that Jones is also trying to catch the elusive ghost of queer subjectivity through a

moment – or *punctum* - she experienced in performance. Franko B's bodily autonomy cannot be mediated without language, yet his performance suggests a body beside/beyond it, a queer moment *where the body is a text that speaks its own silence*. This paradoxical dimension of my analysis potentially applies to both video images and the live performances they record. Does this paradox, however, fully grasp the visceral intricacies of the relational moment of performance?

Transforming Performance: radical intimacy

In describing such a moment as a punctum, Jones suggests a form of visceral imaging that leaves a sensory imprint; the effects of which has 'poignancy': it moves her. Similarly, in 'Critical Tears: Franko B's *I Miss You*', Jennifer Doyle describes her experience of the performance in terms of an emotionally moving experience produced by what she calls the *radical intimacy* of the event:

The tears provoked by Franko's performance made me think about the radical intimacy that sometimes attends to live art ... an aesthetic strategy that marks contemporary art in which the artist offers him or her self up to the audience, and invites us to experience the work as not only autobiographical in terms of the artist, but relational – soliciting a personal, emotional, and narcissistic investment from the spectator.

(Websites: Doyle)⁸

⁸ This critical essay has also been published in *Franko B: Blinded by Love* (Johnson, 2006).

In my interpretation of Doyle's 'radical intimacy' there is a correlation with Kershaw's sense of the 'radical' as discussed in Chapter 1. That is to say, it does more than merely convey a sense of resistance: it expresses a sense of subjective freedom, which transcends the chiasmic contradictions that plague bodily autonomy⁹. As Doyle explains further:

This is what is disturbing about Franko B's performance – not that he bleeds, but that in doing so he crosses a boundary, and carries us with him as he does so. He shifts questions about art and emotion to the audience, moving away from the self-reflexive representation of the artist's emotional state, to the production of feelings themselves – a risky move if ever there was one, if only because he asks us directly if, and how, we plan to love him back.

(Websites: Doyle)

Therefore, radical intimacy, as I understand it, might challenge the dualistic tensions, that exist between self and other to 'actually *produce* such freedoms or at least a sense of them' (Kershaw, 1999: 19), for both performer and spectator within a moment of performance.

Is there a relation between radical intimacy – which Doyle claims moves her across 'boundaries' – and transformative performance, and might this lead us closer to a

⁹ Thus it has an affinity with the political model of resistance/transformation I explored in Chapter 1.

sense of the profound? Certainly both Jones and Doyle's accounts seem to suggest that 'emotionally voluminous' charge which Jill Dolan describes in relation to utopian performatives, considered in the Introduction (2005: 5). Might there be a link between radical intimacy and queer moments? If so, which performance conditions are more likely to produce such intimacy?

In *The History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault accounts for confession in terms of a process through which an analyst incites the hidden desires of the confessing client in the service of regulation and control. Butler's chapter 'Bodily Confessions' in *Undoing Gender* (2004) explores how Foucault revised this earlier formulation in "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self", where he shifts the focus from revelation to transformation. As Butler explains 'there are no desires that are muted by repressive rules, but, rather, only an operation by which the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another's presence and speech' (2004: 163).

In discussing psychoanalytical practice, Butler explains this process in terms of a 'relational moment' between client and analyst. Confession is produced in relation to the speaking subject and yet there will also be an excess of meaning that cannot be known in advance, as it is impossible to control reception/interpretation with all its potential multiplicity. Confession therefore demands that the speaking subject adopts a position of vulnerability. It is through this vulnerability, however, that the subject becomes elaborated, is transformed through speaking. As Butler explains:

In these scenes of speech, both interlocutors find that what they say is to some extent beyond their control but not, for that reason, out of control. If saying is a form of doing, and part of what is getting done is the self, then conversation is a mode of doing something together and becoming otherwise; something will be accomplished in the course of this exchange, but no one will know what or who is being made until it is done.

(2004: 173)

Here both analyst and client are mutually implicated in this act of transformation. At the same time, Butler presents the verbal act of confession as an enunciation of the chiasmic relation of language and materiality. That is to say, the words spoken cannot be separated from the materiality of the body: 'the spoken word is a bodily act at the same time that it forms a certain synecdoche of the body. The vocalising larynx and mouth become the part of the body that stages the drama of the whole' (2004:173). This is why saying is another bodily deed, as much as the body is partly a speech act.

Considering this, the punctum, as described by Jones, might be considered as the excess of meaning produced by a form of bodily confession. In both *I'm Not Your Babe* (1996) and *I Miss You* (2003), Franko B invites his audience to participate relationally through the linguistic framing of the projects which both announce: witness me in relation to you. He confesses his body through his blood, a visceral act of dispossession – blood-letting – which places him in a position of vulnerability

without relinquishing total control. Franko B himself has suggested that through such an act of bodily 'speaking' he is transformed. What I am suggesting, however, is that this act, as Butler's account of confession indicates, may also transform the spectator; it could produce an environment which allows performer and spectator to do something together through performance and to become otherwise. Through a form of visceral confession Franko B potentially produces a performative interrogation of subjectivity: 'where do I begin and end? Where do I find my boundaries? Where is the border of my body/my consciousness, and where is the limit of yours?' (Websites: Jones).

It is especially through these acts of performative confession that an intersubjective environment might be produced. Such questions potentially draw subject and other together into a moment that might be described as one of radical intimacy: as these questions are collectively offered/experienced, then the borders between subjects can become fundamentally unstable. Perhaps it is through such visceral confession that the conditions for transformation may be achieved, though 'no one will know what or who is being made until it is done' (Butler, 2004: 173).

A queer moment might be imagined as a peak of radical intimacy. At this instant, subject and other might be drawn together to share a compelling confession. It is here that I propose a shift between the body as 'text' that is 'read' and the body as 'confession': a shared moment that happens between subject and other, and is *felt* as embodied knowledge. For Amelia Jones, in the blink of a moment it takes for Franko's foot to meet the floor, it 'pricks' her; perhaps this is a climactic peak of

radical intimacy: a queer moment that immediately subsides as soon as it appears, but a trace is left nonetheless. Just as a paradox produces excess of truths, so here Franko B's act of confession possibly reveals something similar.

To return for a moment to Grotowski: this is not a quasi-theological moment of self-revelation, which expresses some divine 'truth' about oneself via the performer. As investigated in the Introduction, such a notion of self-hood has been criticised by Auslander for its metaphysical assumptions, which accepts 'presence' as the undisputable fact and foundation of the subject. Rather, perhaps in the kind of moment that Jones describes, the contradictory chiasmus of subjectivity – the feeling body that seemingly can only be represented through language – is coherently unrepresentable in its appearance, a ghost of a queer subject. Here an excess of truths may be revealed between subjects as *the body confesses its own silence*¹⁰.

Intersubjective Environments

What this argument suggests is that queer moments may be produced as a result of radical intimacy. Intersubjective environments can foster such radical intimacy, which may become queer at its climax. I define intersubjective environments as those that seem to actively encourage reflexive engagement with how 'the subject "means" always in relationship to others and the locus of identity is always elsewhere' (Jones, 1998: 14). The deconstructive power of such environments might

¹⁰ *A body resounds with silent confession* is perhaps an alternative. Because of their multiple ambiguities and contradictions, it may be impossible to formulate a perfect paradox.

reflexively negotiate the terms by which a performer becomes the primary subject, revealing that 'pure' self-possession is continually displaced.

The point of impact of queer moments cannot be identified in advance – they may not actually happen when expected – and neither can the degrees of how the relational components of their production interact be specified. What produces intersubjectivity can vary, therefore so too can the conditions of performance which might produce radical intimacy. This is important because it suggests the possibility, at least, that queer moments could be produced in a variety of different performance environments, not just those that prioritise intersubjectivity as a condition of performance. For example, queer moments may be produced in performance environments that do not proceed through subjective reflexivity. It therefore becomes possible to ask, how might other types of performance environments – such as mainstream theatre performances, for example – produce variable relations of intersubjectivity and radical intimacy? Of course, it is often quite impossible to distinguish between performances that are consciously created to investigate subjectivity and those that are not, as meaning is conditional and will always exceed intention. The perspective informing this argument for instance is one that by necessity is already anticipating intersubjectivity. It should, however, be possible to identify those performance environments that are *more likely* to be conditioned by the 'language' of intersubjectivity. For example, in both *I'm Not Your Babe* (1996) and *I Miss You* (2003) intersubjectivity is potentially implicated from the outset for spectators aware of the performances' titles.

This strategy is even more pronounced in *Aktion 893 (Why Are You Here?)* (2005)¹¹.

Jones describes how 'Franko B invites participants, one at a time, into an empty room fit only with two chairs. While he is fully clothed, the participants arrive naked. He proceeds to engage them in discussion, pivoting around his question "why are you here?"' (Websites: Jones). Arguably, engaging with such a question whilst naked demands radical intimacy within an intersubjective environment. This intersubjectivity is produced through drawing attention to how the event itself self-reflexively stages the conditions for the investigation into the performer/spectator relationship, by the spectator and performer themselves. Jones writes:

Franko B notes to one naked participant the way in which, in social settings, 'we are invisible, to protect ourselves'; to another 'when you meet people you should look them in the eyes... looking for something that is about engagement'; and, with a heartfelt utopianism, 'I believe art should help people to be more open rather than [being] elitist or commercial' ... because he structured the dialogues (as their producer) and is clothed while the participants are naked, he articulates himself as master.

(Websites: Jones)

¹¹ As Jones herself did not witness this performance 'live', but rather through documentary footage, it once again raises the stakes with regards to testing the limits of written language/discourse in relation to queer moments and the feeling body.

Therefore, how power is negotiated between subject and other through language is the contracted site of interrogation between performer and spectator. The 'contract' is enacted through their participation in the event. To reference Butler's version of performativity investigated in Chapter 1: during this performance, it was through consciously 'doing' (through speaking) that 'one's' subjectivity might become undone.

It could be argued that this type of formalised agreement belongs to performance art or body/art in general: the conditions of performance – of presenting the body through modes of performative 'confession' – involves both performer and spectator in what Jones celebrates as *radical narcissism*. It is radical because the exploration and fixation upon the subject cannot help but implicate the other in that exploration. Jones argues that body art, especially in its feminist varieties, has often been condemned (and occasionally exalted) for this form of narcissism (1998: 46). Through the performer/subject relation 'the self turns inside out, as it were, projecting its internal structures of identification and desire outward. Thus, narcissism interconnects the internal and external self as well as the self and other' (1998: 46). This is an aesthetic strategy that demands that the spectator invests in the performance in alignment with the conditions of a deconstructive interpretive exchange, with a self-conscious awareness of this investment.

Of course, if the deconstruction of subjectivity is the 'aim' of such performances¹², the aesthetic demands do not necessarily result in such intended acts of interpretation, but perhaps it is fair to assume that, in deciding to engage with the work, spectators are more than likely already interested in the terms of its aesthetic demands. Potentially this replicates a further kind of narcissism through the conditions implied by this particular aesthetic itself. That is to say, the cultural intelligibility of the exchange, the interrogation of its limitations and the profound ramifications of the excesses to which it might lead, are presupposed by the event's structure. Therefore, it might be argued that performances such as *Aktion 893* (2005) narcissistically reproduce an exchange between those who already identify themselves as subjects within the performing art scene. Does this de-value the process in any way?

At least from the perspective of *Aktion 893* (2005), such charges of narcissism might be contested by the fact that the spectator is required to negotiate their position, not merely in relation to language, materiality and the other, but also in relation to the immediate environment itself (e.g. 'I believe art should help people to be more open rather than [being] elitist or commercial' (Websites: Jones)). Furthermore, this line of argument itself engages with the performances I have considered in this chapter, not through direct experience of them, but rather, through their mediation through documentary footage and/or textual analysis. The profound effect of the punctum experienced by Jones in *I Miss You* (2003) continues to be experienced by

¹² Jones investigates performances by Carolee Scheemann, Marina Abramović and Hannah Wilke to name but a few.

myself from 'outside' that embodied moment 'inside' the live art scene; her writing carries a trace, which productively connects these seemingly dualistic positions. As might be inferred from the blink of Derrida's *augenblick*, queer moments have a duration that exceed their perceived limitations: something survives. This challenges Phelan's non-reproductive thesis with regards to performance ontology. For spectators as well as for performers, the traces produced by queer moments might have a way of moving and transforming beyond their original context, between theory and practice and back again; between performance environments, languages and cultures.

Jones concludes her analysis of *Aktion 893* by stating: 'As with all of his work, his claim to mastery is (equally inexorably) exposed as tenuous if not completely impossible. This failure (poignant or in Barthes' terms punctal and moving) is due to the perversity – the queerness – of his body of work and his body in performance' (Websites: Jones). Interestingly, here her reference to the 'punctum' does not have a similar impact for me as it did in her analysis of *I Miss You*, which I considered in relation to my witnessing of the documentary footage. What are the implications of this for my thesis?

Visceral Reading

There is, I would like to suggest, a relation between the material presence of the spectator and the possibilities of queer moments, transformation and the profound. As Jones argues: 'live performance, in fact, makes this contingency – the intersubjectivity of the interpretive exchange – even more pronounced and obvious

since the body's actions can be interfered with and re-aligned according to other bodies/subjects' (1998: 34). In this chapter, my body was *absent* from the experience which I have attempted to describe, partly through viewing the videos. So whilst I might be able to make connections between the transformative potentials of queer moments in Franko B's performance and the profound moments I experienced in *Such Stuff*, it seems that I should investigate the intersubjectivity of live performance further, by placing my own body back into my analyses of the experience. Because of my material absence from Franko B's performances, language has played an even more significant role in my 'witnessing' and analysing the event here through the visual and written documentation of others.

In analysing embodied experience, this argument has revealed that there is a feeling body, which exists beyond language, but can only be understood because of language. Exceptionally, this contradiction is negotiated when queer moments appear/disappear. Therefore language and representation have their limits, which gesture towards their excesses. What can be learnt from a more viscerally inflected reading of performance? Is this possible if language always already mediates the body? With this in mind, the next chapter will attempt a more viscerally inflected reading of Fura dels Baus' XXX that will attempt to consider the representational *and* material limitations and excesses of performance.

ⁱ The fact that 'I' am not present at this performance, but witnessing through video footage might suggest that the visceral relation of the live event appears not to be available to me. Yet, as I watch Franko B's pulsing veins bleed I find I cannot but respond viscerally: I am reminded that my own body must perish. This is not to disregard my claims that live performance offers an environment where queer moments are *more likely* to happen, but rather reiterates my point that Phelan's claims regarding the uniqueness of performance ontology are not necessarily justified. Later in this chapter I discuss how Jones utilises Roland Barthes' concept of the 'punctum' – which he explores in relation to photographic images – to explain the experience she had whilst watching Franko B's *I Miss You*. If Jones can convincingly find a relationship between live performance and the still image of photography, then perhaps the supposed gaps between video and live performance are also not necessarily so distinct. This might suggest that the absence/lacuna between the untouchable/unrepresentable excess of the feeling body and chiasmic materiality might actually be accessible. Despite mediation, perhaps one can still be touched by the trace of queer moments.

ⁱⁱ In an interview about the performance with Gray Watson, Franko B suggests that one of the key aesthetic factors of the performance was 'beauty' and that 'beauty functions like a bridge. Things that touch you. There are many times you are moved and you don't know why. This is something very, very deep' (Vason, Watson and Wilson, 2001: unpaginated). Though 'beauty' is never defined in the interview, the aim of this chapter is to begin to make more specific connections between the aesthetics/conditions of performance and the 'depth' (profundity) experienced by spectators. Although, as I have mentioned before, the fact that Franko B 'feels' this depth, does not necessarily mean that the spectator will.

ⁱⁱⁱ Of course, there is every possibility that this 'moment' would not occur for Jones or other spectators, though it may have done for Franko B (cf. the quotation in the note above). However, I am investigating the conditions of performance *most likely* to lead to the 'accident' of the queer moment, as arguably was experienced here during the performance by Jones. Interestingly, Gray Watson also refers to the fact that Franko B's art 'takes you to the most intense moments and the things which really motivate you' (2001: unpaginated). This is particularly relevant because, as I argued in Chapter 1, queer moments have the potential to politically motivate those who experience them. As products of ethico-political relations they indicate the transformative/resistant possibilities of performance through producing an undetermined space *beyond* ideology.

Chapter 4

Fura Dels Baus' XXX: contradictions, excesses, multiplicity

Introduction

Bodies in live performance are by necessity contradictory because of the chiasmic relation between language and materiality. That is to say, as Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter and Undoing Gender* (1993: xi; 2004: 87), the live body can only be mediated through language but nevertheless exists besides/beyond it: they are interdependent but never fully collapsible into the other. So far this thesis has focused primarily on this contradiction from the perspective of language and representation, though of course it has been impossible to analyse them independent of materiality, such is the nature of paradoxes of performativity.

From this perspective, I have argued that queer moments might emerge as an effect of radical intimacy. But what other factors might emerge when the contradictions of bodily autonomy are examined from a more materially inflected perspective? More particularly, how might desire condition the potential radical intimacy and queer moments of performance? This chapter begins to interrogate what a process of 'visceral reading', as one might call it, might produce. As already suggested, this move will likely be provisional and limited as it is quite impossible to address materiality without recourse to language. Even so a shift in perspective might be productive for this investigation into what makes queer embodied moments political, transformative and profound. In attempting to understand such moments,

this chapter will argue that as well as paying attention to the way performance deconstructs its language and representations, it is also crucial to examine how performances negotiate their circuits of desire, which are always embodied.

XXX

The focus on practice in this chapter will be a performance of XXX, presented at the Riverside Studios, London, April 2003, by the Spanish theatre company La Fura dels Baus. Based on the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1965), originally written in 1795, the production told the story of Eugénie, a chaste young girl, and her gradual induction into a world of unbridled sensual pleasure. This process of 'liberation' concludes with her participating in the torture, rape and mutilation of her mother. Perhaps not surprisingly, the show became the centre of prolific media attention. Several articles and reviews investigating its apparent sexually explicit content appeared, for example in *The British Theatre Guide* (Websites: Fletcher); the *Guardian* (Websites: Billington; Tremlett); the *Observer* (Websites: Clapp) and the *Daily Telegraph* (Websites: Reynolds). Reports of its graphic depiction of sexual acts on stage lead it to being witnessed and sanctioned by officers from the London Metropolitan Police and its vice squad.

In de Sade's novel, Eugénie's induction into the world of pleasure is initiated by three collaborators: Madame de Saint Ange, 'the most licentious of women' (1965: 186), her brother and incestuous partner, Chevalier de Mirvel, and Dolmancé, 'the most evil individual, the greatest scoundrel in the world' (1965: 188). During this process of indoctrination Eugénie excitedly exclaims:

Oh! My divine teachers, I see full well that, according to your doctrine, there are very few crimes in the world, and that we may peacefully follow the bent of all our desire, however singular they may appear to fools who, shocked and alarmed by everything, stupidly confuse social institutions for Nature's divine ordinations.

(1965: 237)

Eugénie, inspired by a philosophy of 'complete freedom' (Sade, 1965: 245), learns that 'whatever be the extreme lengths she goes to, never will she render herself guilty of any evil' (1965: 245) and becomes complicit in the horrific mutilation of her motherⁱ(*aside*).

Loosely inspired by the original novel, XXX re-contextualised the story of Eugénie to the present day and transformed Madame de Saint Ange into Madam Lula, a retired porn star. Her brother was re-named Giovanni although Dolmancé's name remained unchanged. These four characters are 'the motor that drive this spectacle of the corruption of innocence, of perversion and madness' (Websites: Fura Dels Baus) placed against the cultural backdrop of the pornography industry.

In performance at the Riverside Studios the set was minimal. Raked seating descended to the stage floor, a black square that was dominated by a gigantic screen mounted back stage left. During the course of the show, other pieces of set emerged – for example, a dressing table and a large bed – but, apart from the screen, the

design seemed to encourage a focus on the performers' bodies. The performance mixed a variety of media: live theatre, literature, music, pre-recorded material and even the Internet; its performers interacted not only with each other but also with the audience and with websites, documentary footage and film, which appeared on the large screen. Linguistically it used both Spanish and English, the latter in particular during the audience participation sections.

Prior to the performance starting, the screen displayed a message that invited the audience to publicly display their hidden desires through texting a number using their mobile phones. Then Madame Lula appeared naked on stage and squatted over a projector, pen clenched in her vagina, with which she wrote 'A better world is possible'. On the afternoon I saw the show this was greeted with applause. Eugénie appeared and, following an interview with Madam Lula conducted in Spanish with English subtitles, it became evident that this young girl was considering a career in pornography. What followed was an extended 'audition' where Eugénie engaged in a variety of sex-acts with Madam Lula, Giovanni and Dolmancé. The four performers, in a series of contrasting sexual scenarios, simulated representations of twosomes, threesomes, and foursomes; this also included covering themselves with buckets of baked beans and acts of sodomy that incorporated elements of sado-masochistic behaviour.

Halfway through the show Eugénie said she felt as though she had gone too far and decided to leave, though Dolmancé assured her that she would return. An 'interval' was announced by the actress playing Madam Lula during which the three

performers who remained proceeded to engage with members of the audience. Three people were seemingly chosen at random – on this particular afternoon, two younger men and an older man – and Madam Lula chose the one she most wanted to fellate. This simulated sequence was cut short through the ‘volunteer’s’ apparent inability to get an erection. The actor playing Dolmancé then announced that they were conducting an experiment and pheromones were being pumped among the spectators to incite sexually aroused behaviour, though these ‘pumps’ were never revealed. During this section he filmed the audience; images of our faces were transmitted onto the screen, which then morphed into a group of people engaging in graphic sexual acts, supposedly representing the ‘success’ of the experiment.

Following the ‘interval’, Eugénie returned to complete her initiation but was soon followed by her mother who attempted to rescue her daughter. Presented through fragmentary pre-recorded images on the screen, the mother was attacked and raped by Eugénie and the others; her vagina was sewn shut, and she was left mutilated in a waste disposal bin. As a coda to the performance the actors performed the tantalising moves of a striptease, but in reverse as they gradually became fully clothed dressed in contemporary style.

Representational Limits

The *Guardian*’s Giles Tremlett suggested that ‘if there is a message in XXX, it is that there is a limit to everything. The plot invites everyone to ask themselves: “Where should this stop?”’ (Websites: Tremlett). From this vantage point XXX could be interpreted as a grotesque cautionary tale, which warns against the potential

violations that might occur when desire is given free rein to the point of oppressive excess. This was a criticism often launched against queer theory (Weeks, 1995: 29; Bristow, 1997: 22): that the project of 'liberating desire' might also encourage an unbridled and unethical impetus towards personal satisfaction at the expense of others. As noted in Chapter 1, Butler answered queer theory's critics through her 'philosophy of freedom': a need to work towards a norm of non-violence (2004: 206) through continually asking which processes intensify the violence of exclusion and which are working to counter violation? (Butler, 2004: 225). There is therefore a radical disjuncture between the Sadean philosophy of 'complete freedom' and Butler's philosophy of freedom. Through Tremlett's question – 'where should this stop?' – we might consider whether or not XXX offered an opportunity for the spectator to decide where he/she might align themselves in relation to these positions.

I will argue, however, that any attempts to explore how representations and desires produced corporeal violations were subverted by the performance environment of XXX, which simultaneously violated the bodies of its performers and spectators. I ask: how were these violations produced and what can this tell us about queer moments in performance? In *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*, Nick Ridout announces that he is most interested in a 'theatre that invites us perversely to enjoy our ethical discomfort and to think politically about the sources of such enjoyment' (2006: 31). I will argue that the performance environment of XXX did *not* offer such a space to reflect, think politically, or enjoy any ethical discomfort

due to its multiple contradictions, which produced a politically confusing environment.

In Tremlett's article in the *Guardian*, Edgar Despaigne, a Cuban actor who was in the show's Barcelona premiere performances but did not perform in its London run, claimed that in performance the cast were 'right at the limit of our compromise as actors. But everything we do is still pretend, still a game' (Websites: Tremlett). This comment draws attention to how XXX may have pushed its performers towards a form of violation despite its simulated, representational framework. I will argue, in contrast, that the performers were subjected to violating processes *because* of its representational framework.

In the previous chapter, I explored how queer autonomy might be momentarily achieved through a form of bodily confession that negotiated vulnerability in relation to the other. In XXX however, the conditions of performance limited any such potential because its aesthetic seemed always to produce a hierarchy between the live actors' sexual simulations and the mediated pornographic representations of sex-acts on the large screen. This seemed to situate the actors as secondary simulative copies to a more authentically 'real' representation. This is because throughout the show various simulated acts of sexual penetration were carried out using what were obviously prosthetic penises. This, combined with the pornographic mediated images, consistently drew attention to the fact that the act of sex could not be represented on stage both for legal and 'technical' reasons. What the

performers enacted on stage was 'fake', whilst what appeared on screen was presented as 'real'.

For example, during the 'interval', when the actors appeared to be filming the audience's response to the simulated pheromone experiment, what we actually witnessed on screen was a group of pornographic actors engaging in actual, non-simulated fellatio. Pornographic actors obviously had been filmed previously in an alternative theatre auditorium, i.e. it was not a live video feed. This was confirmed by an Internet search I conducted after the show; I also learned that Private, a Swedish porn company, had sponsored the event (Websites: Roberts). As well as this contrasting example of 'real' sexual practice, throughout the performance, the screen sometimes displayed montages of explicit and what might be considered as ethically problematic material: images that included bodily mutilation and even footage of a woman being penetrated by a pony.

Arguably, such material renders the prosthetic simulation of sodomy performed by the actors tame in comparison. The fact that the London Metropolitan Police and its vice squad had been called in to investigate the performance had been well publicised, no doubt adding to its appeal. In contrast, the mediatised representations produced images that exceeded the restrictions that might have been imposed on the performance as a live event. This worked to affirm an aesthetic distinction between the simulated live performance of the performers and the 'real' mediatised performance of the action that appeared on screen. The contradictory nature of this relationship is potentially powerful ethically, as an exploration of it

could raise important questions about why the law makes such a distinction between mediatised and live representations, and what the ethical implications of that distinction might constitute.

However, there was no attempt, so far as I could see, to reflexively interrogate the relationship between these live and mediatised representations *during* the show. In a paper delivered at a symposium on *Virtuosity and Performance Mastery* at Middlesex University in June 2003, Signy Henderson argued that the live performance of the actors in XXX could never meet the excessive horizon of expectation generated by the public discourse that surrounded the show (Signy, 2003). With regards to its content, the anticipation of the audience was heightened not only by newspaper and magazine articles, but also by notices published by the Riverside Studios that warned of its potentially offensive material. From this perspective, Henderson argued that the way the performance was framed, both by what it seemed to promise and in its use of media, meant that the performers appeared to have no control over the show:

Is this Theatre of Cruelty, with the performers as the victims? Do they know that they are victims, and if not, is their degradation and humiliation more, or less, extreme? What does that make the spectator, then, as we accept this contract with the production behind the backs – over the heads – of the live performers on stage?

(Henderson, 2003: 9-10)

As I argued in the last chapter, queer moments tend to emerge through a negotiation of vulnerability and control between performers and spectators. Therefore, if the frame of the performance functions to already compromise this dynamic – for example by promising a horizon of expectation that the performers cannot possibly meet – and this difficulty is not explicitly negotiated, then the experience of radical intimacy is less likely to be achieved.

Excesses of Desire

For the performers in XXX, a sense of control may have been further compromised through the way the conditions of performance invited the spectators to gaze at them voyeuristically. Within this gaze, the performers' bodies could become fetishised commodities within the apparatus of theatre as a commercial system. This might occur, firstly, through the way that publicity, marketing strategies and issues of censorship worked collectively to produce an incitement of spectatorial desire for the product of performance. And second, in the way their sculpted bodies were constantly paraded on titillating and tantalising display throughout its duration. Of course, the 'titillating' and 'tantalising' here owe as much to my subjective interpretation of those bodies as to the style in which they were presented.

Foucault provides a way of understanding the relation between the publicity that surrounded XXX and the incitement of desire. In *The Will to Knowledge: the History of Sexuality* (1976) he argues that any institutional attempts to control desire through regulatory processes such as naming, confession and spatial interventions,

contribute to the production and circulation of those desires that they attempt to control. So for example, the emergence of the 'homosexual' as a medically pathologised type produced a discourse of sexuality that proliferated and evolved so that homosexuality became a viable political position.

Regulatory intervention certainly seemed to increase the public's interest in XXX: 'When it opened in London last April, the British tabloids frenziedly focused on the show's lucid depictions of sex. Shocked locals complained about its content, but London's Metropolitan police cleared the show of any criminality. Ticket sales promptly skyrocketed' (Websites: Low). Even before this sequence of events, the harnessing of spectatorial desire to serve its commercial interests arguably was embedded in its very naming, producing a titillating form of self-advertisement. The title XXX ironically captures the contradictions of censorship as it both silences and produces a sense of the explicit nature of the show. So it would seem reasonable to assume that desire significantly contributed to the public discourse that surrounded the performance prior to the event.

I have argued above that their performances could never succeed in meeting such excessive horizons of expectation because their bodies were continually presented as objects for voyeuristic consumption. In comparison to the comparatively short, MTV-style flashes of pornography that appeared on the screen, it was for me far easier to fixate my gaze upon the nubile young flesh on display live. With its focus on scopophilic pleasure, it seemed that the performance continued to harness my

spectatorial desire; after all, as Freud argues, 'visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused' (Freud, 1991: 300).

In *Unmarked* Peggy Phelan suggests that 'visibility is a trap...it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes a voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession' (Phelan, 1993: 6). Here we might consider that the visual specifically refers to the contradiction of what Jonathan Dollimore examines as the 'politics of containment' (Dollimore, 1991: 81). As investigated in Chapter 1, though a gay liberation movement ensures public visibility, arguably it reproduces a trap within which homosexuality is always already contained by heteronormativity. This may also be extended to include the way that scopophilic pleasure in the performance of XXX, incited by its sexually explicit visible bodies, is likely to have produced a similar sense of voyeurism, fetishism and appetite for possession. Elin Diamond, in *Unmaking Mimesis*, asks for a 'female body in representation that resists fetishization and a viable position for the female spectator' (1997: 44). Such a body is of course a result, not merely of representation, but of interpretation; an intersubjective production of the performer/spectator duality. As already noted, this reflexive negotiation of intersubjectivity is part of how queer moments might be produced. However, the way XXX framed its performers, both prior to and during the event, may well have made it difficult for the performers' and audiences' bodies to resist such intersubjective fetishisation.

What all this suggests is that the incitement of spectatorial desire played a fundamental role in XXX. It risked subjugating the performers through their failure to

live up to its horizons of expectation, as produced by the venue and the media coverage surrounding the event. It also meant that they were more likely to emerge as fetishised objects to meet my incited desires. The exploitation of desire was therefore a fundamental part of the performance. At any given point in XXX the performers could easily have been turned into the subjects of multiple and contradictory excesses of desire. From the perspective of queer moments, it is therefore not sufficient to simply deal with how desire is represented onstage; it is also necessary to investigate how circuits of desire within performance might produce a challenge to any performative attempts to deconstruct the way representations might produce hierarchic dualisms.

How control is negotiated, retained and relinquished between performers and spectators has a vital part to play in producing radical intimacy. As the last chapter explored, this is when the borders between self and other become fundamentally unstable. This negotiation is a balancing act between performers and spectators, between autonomy and subjection. Franko B, as he traversed the catwalk that he had bloodied, walked this paradoxical knife-edge between subject/other through an act of control: he controlled the flow of his blood in its duration, yet at the same time made himself vulnerable because its rate of flow was unpredictable. Through this process he embodied Butler's account of a bodily confession; that is to say, despite confessing his vulnerability to the audience, he maintained a sense of agency through that confession. Though it is impossible to control reception and interpretation – the performer makes himself/herself vulnerable through this

process – it is possible to produce conditions of performance that might facilitate such a negotiation through reciprocity of interpretation and reception.

In contrast, and to briefly summarise, the conditions of XXX meant that the performers were less likely or able to resist subjugation: firstly, because of the relation of their live simulated performance onstage to the ‘real’ mediated performance on screen; and secondly, because of the way we were invited to fetishise their bodies. This loss of control by the performers is an important consideration because, throughout the show, it was the performers themselves who seemed to control proceedings, whilst as an audience member I (and no doubt others) tacitly agreed to be manipulated. This unspoken agreement to conform and comply with the artifice of performance leads to a hierarchy of control/subjugation. However, as this analysis aims to demonstrate, in the XXX performance the performer/spectator duality was far less stable than one might at first have imagined.

To control representation is to wield social power. Television, for example, has the power to manipulate the conditions through which representations are mediated. It can edit and limit the potential excess of its performance and exercise control through the way it frames its subject, though of course reception and interpretation may always exceed intention. Live performance has the potential to transform the limitations of this exchange, *in the moment*, because its hierarchies are negotiable. This was demonstrated by the way that the XXX performers’ representations were rendered as vulnerable and how the power shifted between the performers,

spectators and the mediatised frame. But even given the 'openness' of those multiple perspectives of representation and desire, I will next argue that the performance environment also subjugated its spectators. How therefore, did the conditions of performance violate the bodies of its spectators to severely limit any potential for radical intimacy?

Violating the Audience

Geraldine Harris argues that any account of a show:

Will be influenced by which particular performance of a show is taken as the object of study, where and when this took place and even the positioning of the spectator within the auditorium. Equally, any interpretation will always be mediated both through the subjectivity of the spectator and the form the record takes. It is not possible therefore to produce an objective or definitive selection of the event, since ultimately all such accounts are selective, partial and impure.

(1999: 4-5)

Therefore my account of how the conditions of performance violated the bodies of its spectators of course will be filtered through my own subjective perspective, desires and other contingencies. The participants and other witnesses of these events that I write about may well not have been experiencing it in the same way. However, it is precisely when performance environments find ways to negotiate

such contradictions – by producing performative paradoxes – that queer moments might emerge.

I will focus on what happened during the show's most explicit sequence of 'audience participation' in order to investigate how representations and desire produced a series of contradictions that challenged Butler's notion of a philosophy of freedom. During the 'interval' and following the simulated pheromone experiment, the audience were asked if anyone would like to accompany the cast on stage. To my surprise, three members 'volunteered' and once they had joined the performers, the actress playing Madam Lula had the task of selecting the one on whom she would most like to perform fellatio. After a moment of deliberation, the one she appeared to find most attractive was chosen and the other two were sent away again. One who had been refused was the oldest man, but rather than returning to his seat he went and sat next to two women, staring at them in what seemed to be a suggestive, erotically charged manner. This exchange appeared to be the cause of real anxiety for some who witnessed it – 'Is this real?' a woman next to me asked – as well as the women who were the objects of the gentleman's gaze, who shifted uncomfortably in their seats. Meanwhile, on stage, Madam Lula was attempting to simulate fellatio on the volunteer. He was sent back to his seat due to his 'inability' to get an erection, though this act of 'failure' was simulated upon what was obviously a prosthetic penis. Participatory exchange within performance, as explored in the previous chapter, carries the promise of subjective interrogation and mutual transformation through radical intimacy. So, how was it that these events compromised this potential?

In XXX such potential was already limited, as the conditions of participation had been decided in advance. La Fura dels Baus's website offered free tickets to spectators who were willing to take part in the show. Though I only became aware of this fact after the event, the simulative nature of the performance suggested the artifice of these exchanges. Having said that, the precise nature of this selection process and the rules of its exchange remained invisible, to the extent that a hierarchical binary was interjected into the process of participation: between those performers and spectators 'in the know' and those who remained ambivalent or suspicious.

Furthermore, the staged act of attempted fellatio meant that the performance of the participant was always constructed to 'fail'. This is not to suggest that the artifice of simulation should have been replaced by the 'real' act so that the audience member was at least given the opportunity to perform successfully. Rather I am suggesting that this moment implicitly gestured to how representation can fail us and deny us our agency in the moment of performance: the success of performativity lies in how it fails us, through 'doing' we become 'undone'. For here, quite literally, was the suggestion of the body that did and did not belong to the volunteer: the prosthetic phallus was presented as his own, and yet could not fully represent him. It might be understood from this perspective as a synecdoche for the contradiction of bodily autonomy. That is, if language and representation are how the body is mediated primarily and yet there is a materiality that exists beside/beyond these constructs, then language and representation will always fail, as the synthetic phallus 'failed' in its performance.

This thesis has so far suggested that the negotiation of such failures may produce potentially transformative and profound moments and that control is an important element within this negotiation. This potential, however, was compromised in the moment of the 'failed fellatio' because the conditions of performance worked to deny any sense – on either his or the audience's part – of the participant's control of the situation. The moment of performance failed to illuminate the powers of performative success; its contradictions remained invisible so the failure of representation was 'disguised' as the failure of the subject to function within its violating order. The conditions of performance therefore ensured that the potential negotiation of the subject/other in XXX was severely compromised.

Further problematic violations emerged as a result of this sequence. When the older man did not return to his own seat I became immediately uncomfortable because it was hard to tell whether this incident was meant to take place within the intended structure of the performance, or whether it was actually a point of participatory disruption. Through taking an unexpected path through the tiered seating, through sitting in an unexpected place, through gazing in an unexpected way, he produced a very 'real' sense of threat. Whatever way one looks at it – as artifice planned in advance or as an improvised disruption to the representational mechanisms of artifice – the 'danger' of this moment was heightened by the way the man suddenly emerged as the abject other. One of the reasons that he emerged as other was because he appeared to be in distinct opposition to what had so far in the performance been the dominant mode of representation: the beautiful, sculpted

and most importantly, youthful bodies of the performers. The idea that 'younger' was more favourable than 'older' was firmly reinforced the moment he was banished from stage in favour of the more youthful participant, a symbolic process of exclusion from the realm of what might be considered as the culturally acceptable representations of desire and sexuality. This interpretation gestures towards the performance's apparent inability to deconstruct its own representational systems of dominance and the exclusions on which they were predicated.

Negotiating Multiplicity: representations and desires

In a deeply problematic way, the anxiety produced in the audience by this disruption highlighted how the performance environment did not encourage a process that negotiated between control and vulnerability. This was perhaps augmented by the way the performers continued the action on stage seemingly unaware of these peripheral proceedings, so that they emerged as an alternative narrative beyond their control. Even if this disruption had been planned, the fact that it was not reflexively interrogated within the performance aesthetics signalled a refusal to interrogate the multiple contradictions created by its performance.

Through challenging the normative order of the performance environment the elderly gentleman rendered visible the multiple representational violations of performance as well as its problematic circuits of desire. Examining the way his actions seemed to exceed the representational frame illuminates the implicit hierarchies that it seemed to foster, for example its privileging of youth, which I confess I had fetishised. I thus became a compliant participant in a dynamic that

coerced and manipulated its audience to take part in its potentially ethically dubious practice. Crucially however, if I interpret this sequence of events as the gentleman taking control and reclaiming a sense of agency through disrupting the 'norm' and highlighting these contradictions, it was not achieved through a mutually transformative process of radical intimacy. Rather it appeared that others were violated in the process, as the two young girls became the object of his seemingly predatory gaze. The multiplicity of performance and its contradictions spiralled through desiring circuits of oppressive excesses. So, though the 'desires' of Madam Lula excluded the gentleman, in response his desires appeared to fetishise the bodies of the young, female spectators.

The point here is not to propose a categorical foreclosure of the queer and transformative potential of XXX, but rather to examine how the limitations of performance environments might be more likely to produce problematic contradictions than productive paradoxes. Performance is multiple in the interpretations and desires it can generate; and, therefore, it is potentially always contradictory. But the initiation of a binary between complicit and non-complicit audience members does not necessarily produce political paralysis. Neither does the live/mediated binary, nor the fluctuating subjection/objection dualism between performers/spectators. A crucial key to this conundrum is how performances negotiate these dualisms through the conditions of their environment. That is why the incident with the older man and the anxiety it produced is so interesting, as it directly relates to the performance's inability to negotiate these dualisms non-hierarchically and inclusively.

To summarise: the violations produced by the excesses of desire in the narrative were subtly reflected within the conditions of performance through the way the bodies of its audience were potentially 'used' and fetishised: as the young man 'failed to perform' and the gentleman seemingly objectified other audience members. So, if there was any implicit critique of the excesses of desire in the narrative they were contradicted non-reflexively by the violations produced by the conditions of performance: the show did not simultaneously encourage a critical consideration of these violations.

In contrast, the body was fundamental to my investigation of how Franko B potentially produced radical intimacy through the way he confessed his corporeal vulnerability to destabilize the hierarchy of subject/other between performer and spectator. Whereas in XXX, the way the condition of performance framed the bodies of the performers made such a negotiation difficult. Desire was pivotal to this process and it is impossible to fully separate the excesses of desire from the subjugating effects that its representations produced. It is perhaps inevitable that, whereas the initial intention of this chapter was to produce a materially inflected visceral reading of XXX, in the process of writing it has been impossible not to talk about/through representation. In true Foucauldian fashion, power and pleasure are fundamental to the way such representations operate. Somewhat appropriately for a performance based on Sadean philosophy, performers and spectators became Sadists and Sado-Masochists: dual agents and victims of subjugation, commodification and fetish.

Frames of Recognition: seeing feelingly

Part of Butler's project, as examined in the Introduction, is to suggest that there is a common human vulnerability beside/beyond language, which is the condition of ethics, though not necessarily its guarantee. It is therefore crucial to investigate those processes that render such vulnerability invisible. What was perhaps most ironic about XXX was that it provided an opportunity to elicit a similar critique of how 'frames' work to ideologically disguise common human vulnerability, and the violations between humans that might ensue as a result.

Eugénie's final act in the performance, and the culmination of her induction into the doctrines of 'complete freedom', is to lead the rape and mutilation of her mother who has come to her rescue. As de Sade's novel suggests, if one is encouraged to follow the 'bent of all our desire' (1965: 237), then the act of murder can easily be justified: 'if nature incites us to murderous acts, she has need of them; that once grasped, how may we suppose ourselves guilty in her regard when we do nothing more than obey her intentions?' (1965: 332). In performance the horrific brutality of the gang rape of the mother was presented not through live action, but rather through fragmented, recorded images projected on the large screen. Unlike the graphic details of pornography that we had been subjected to throughout, this sequence was apparently 'un-watchable'. It was rendered literally '*ob-scene*' – too excessive to be represented 'live' on stage – indicating the original Greek connotation of the word. So despite the sensory overload of the live performance, perhaps we were meant to be suddenly distanced from corporeal violation by the edited and mediatised image? What might we learn from this mediatised

intervention about how frames of recognition can work to disguise a common human vulnerability?

In *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton also investigates a sense of common human vulnerability from an ethical perspective, proposing that it is the one thing we significantly share with the rest of the human species. The ability to violate the body of another, he argues, may often be the result of a paradoxical cultural intervention:

What may persuade us that certain human bodies lack all claim on our compassion is culture. Regarding some of our fellow humans as inhuman requires a fair degree of cultural sophistication. It means having literally to disregard the testimony of our senses. This, at any rate, should give pause to those for whom 'culture' is instinctively an affirmative term.

(2003: 155-56)

Eagleton places the issue of morality between the binary of nature/culture, similarly reflecting the material/language dualism within which Butler situates her ethical investigation. Common human vulnerability is the pivot for ethics, which provides the balance between the dualisms of language/materiality in an encounter between subject/other. However there are cultural processes that actively intervene in this encounter, making common human vulnerability difficult to achieve and recognise.

If excessive culturalisation risks producing moral blind spots, that is to say, if language and representations can work to disguise the vulnerability that we have in common, how things are represented and ‘framed’ clearly has a part to play in their production. In *Frames of War*, Butler argues that certain frames ‘operate to produce certain subjects as “recognizable” persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize’ (2009: 6). Applying this idea to XXX, we may interpret the use of the screen through which the act of murder is mediated as a symbolic articulation of how certain frames of recognition can work to ideologically distance, or even erase, our common human vulnerability. Here, the screen becomes a metaphor for how language, representation and culture might blur the frames of recognition so that corporeal violation may be realisedⁱⁱ (*aside*).

Terry Eagleton, looking at Shakespeare’s *King Lear* from this perspective, argues that the trajectory of its protagonist’s journey is one that allows Lear to recognise corporeal vulnerability, which produces in him a creaturely compassion for others: Lear learns to ‘see feelingly’ (2003: 182-183). Likewise, as described in Chapter 3, the radical intimacy of Franko B’s performance produced *a punctum* for Amelia Jones as his vulnerability communicated something to her experientially: *she saw him feelingly*. They shared a sense of a feeling body beside/beyond representation, a body that confesses its own silence. For a moment, she experienced the material ‘excess’ that cannot be spoken/represented, through its confession/representation; perhaps she experienced something akin to the Levinasian face.

The irony of XXX was that, despite its implicit critique of representational frames of recognition, the conditions of performance framed its performers and spectators in ways that made it potentially difficult for the spectators to see bodies feelingly; because of the ways in which it investigated the potential violations produced by excessive desire, it fetishised its subjects through encouraging non-reflexive circuits of desire. In *Theatre & Audience*, Helen Freshwater argues that theatre practitioners need to recognise that participation 'may involve making ourselves vulnerable as we open ourselves to unexpected experiences and outcomes. They surely also need to give participants the space to reflect upon the limitations of creative and political agency' (2009b: 76). Such was the contradictory multiplicity of XXX, created by the ways in which it failed to deconstruct its representations or reflexively interrogate its circuits of desires, that its participants, both performers and spectators, were given little space to negotiate their mutual vulnerabilities. Its environment did not encourage reflexivity to engage with the multiple discursive and material limitations that conditioned the participatory exchange.

These contradictions were not negotiated within the processes of performance but rather, left as multiple ambivalent contradictions which, I contend, produced a confused political environment. That is to say, it was not made immediately at any point clear how the performance related to de Sade's political philosophy, which advocates a Machiavellian pursuit of pleasure at the expense of others. Performers were subjugated and fetishised by the limits of its performance aesthetics and the excesses of unbridled spectatorial desire. Spectators were subjugated by its failure to reflexively transmute the dualisms that its representations embodied, and the

excesses such representations produced. In short, its conditions did not encourage a reflexively inclusive relation between performers/spectators and the show's subject matter. Rather, the performative environment potentially subjugated both performers and spectators in an ethically dubious, potentially unrestrained orgy of power and pleasure. Here again (as Chapter 1 explored) 'ethics displaces from politics' (Butler and Connolly, 2005: 5) because a wilful turn away from the ethical encounter is fundamental to a politics that prioritises the individual above and beyond anything else. That is to say, it denies the possibility that the Levinasian face can produce the most basic mode of responsibility towards the other.

The Multiple Perspectives of Performance: moments of clarity

So how might the above analysis be useful to understanding the conditions that might produce queer moments? Returning to Nick Ridout's argument, I am aware of an implicit contradiction here because, on the one hand, I have critiqued XXX for failing to provide a context to perversely enjoy and think politically about ethical discomfort, and, on the other hand, this very act of writing seems like a way of perversely enjoying and thinking through the ethical discomfort that XXX produced¹. The performance, from this perspective, was a success as it stimulated a desire to formulate a response that may illuminate my relation to its representational/material dualisms from an ethical point of view.

¹ For a further discussion about the relationship of writing to the ethics of performance cf. *Theatre & Ethics* (2009: 61-63).

I am not interested in discussing performance from the perspective of its success or failure in aesthetic, ethical or political impact. In fact, this argument has sought to illuminate the way in which it is illogical to discuss live performance from the perspective of the foreclosures of these dualisms. The multiple perspectives generated by live theatre means that, in general, it potentially offers a vast spectrum of positions, not only depending on the way you see it, but also how you hear it, smell it, feel it, even speak it – prior to, during or after the event. Indeed, this writing attempts to be a way of speaking the performance after the event: it mediates and attempts to communicate the experience in its constitutive complexities through a mode of textual translation – in this sense it aims to be transformative. In fact, this very act of transformation troubles the success/failure binary as a framework for theorising performance because a successful critique is contingent on the performance's failure. So however you look at performance, it is always possible to view it from other, contradictory, perspectivesⁱⁱⁱ (*aside*).

It therefore seems far more accurate and/or plausible in respect of the nature of performance to consider, whenever possible, its dualistic operations. This does not mean that it becomes quite impossible to discuss performance in a meaningful way, but rather my analysis aims to encourage a focus on moments when such dualisms converge to become potentially productively and transformatively queer. In *Staging Femininities* Geraldine Harris argues that:

The political effect of any given work is not a matter of authorship
or form, or of individual readers, or of interpretative communities,

or institutional, social or material location, theories or practices, but of the specific dynamic existing between these diverse elements at a particular moment in time.

(1999: 172)

It is quite impossible to pay attention to all aspects of particular performances simultaneously. This is because performance is multiply contingent in ways similar, but not identical, to how the interpretation of that performance is multiply contingent.

Besides generating its particular contradictions of live performance, XXX was bound to produce further complexity because it was based on de Sade's work. In their introduction to de Sade's writings, Jean Paulhan and Maurice Blanchot highlight that the difficult breadth of Sade's ideas mean that 'they abound in contradictions and paradoxes, and may be quoted to prove or demonstrate a vast spectrum of opinion' (1965: 181). Carlos Padrissa, XXX's co-writer claimed that 'the show is a metaphor for the double standards in our society when it comes to sex' (Websites: Reynolds). In fact, because it reproduced these double standards through its multiple contradictions, it certainly served its own purposes. The fact that a pornography company sponsored the performance meant that as spectators we became default participants within the industry. Through this we were made complicit in what is arguably, as Kershaw proposes, an exploitative system of capitalist consumption, a system within which the theatre industry itself is also implicated (Kershaw, 1999: 52-

56). Sexual freedom was investigated through processes of excessive consumption and exploitation.

It is here that I make a distinction between a performance that inspires an analysis of its contradictions after the event, and one that negotiates those contradictions productively 'in the embodied moment': between a performance that leaves its contradictions as politically ambivalent, and one that transforms those contradictions into ethically profound encounters. XXX's confused political environment lacked such moments of clarity because it failed to negotiate with spectators its contradictory representations and desires. Of course, the process of negotiating the dynamics of linguistic/material and subject/other can never be resolved. However, because 'the performer and the spectator are deeply implicated as having ethical and political responsibility for the struggle over making meanings in the reproduction of the culture of which they are part' (Harris, 1999: 176), live performance could allow us to engage precisely in how this negotiation might work in practice, as the following chapter explores. It is only then that such contradictions and multiplicity might give way to moments of clarity, and when queer moments emerge as resplendently paradoxical.

ⁱ Eugénie's justification of violence based on the laws of 'Nature' is also paralleled in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (2005) through the character of Edmund. For a discussion of the ethical implications of *King Lear* cf. *Theatre & Ethics* (2009: 29-31).

ⁱⁱ In *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), Hans-Thies Lehmann argues:

The basic structure of perception mediated by media is such that there is no experience of a connection among the individual images received but above all no connection between the receiving and sending of signs; there is no experience of a relation between address and answer. Theatre can respond to this only with a *politic of perception*, which could at the same time be called an *aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)*. Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside it can move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception. Such an experience would be not only aesthetic but therein at the same time ethico-political.

(1999: 185-6)

Here again we see how ethics and politics may be closely linked (to the extent that Lehmann discusses performance from an ethico-political perspective) and how the live encounter offers a fruitful location for an exploration of ethical relations.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am not here suggesting that queer moments are merely a product of what you choose to see or read into any given performance. As I have stated in the Introduction, the challenge of this thesis lies in attempting to demonstrate that queer moments exist whilst retaining that they are impossible to fix because performance is always in process. They are however, as each chapter demonstrates, the product of specific conditions of performance (radical intimacy being the condition investigated in the previous chapter). So, although it is impossible to guarantee queer moments, they are more likely to occur in performances that re-produce these conditions.

Chapter 5

Attempts On Her Life/Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi: translations

Introduction

Queer moments potentially emerge in performance when dualistic hierarchies of difference are negotiated and provisionally cohere simultaneously. To put this another way, they are moments of contingent coherence – of paradoxical clarity – within the multiple contradictory perspectives of performance. So far, the argument of this thesis has revolved primarily around the dualisms of masculinity/femininity, male/female and subject/other. These serial binaries have been explored from the perspectives of language/materiality. From these perspectives, the paradox of bodily autonomy – hinging between the contradictions of the language/materiality dualism – is what brings focus to the multiplicity of performance in practice.

This limitation is useful because such is the multiplicity of performance that it is impossible to explore comprehensively the potential contesting dualisms in play at any given moment. In addition, the radical intimacy of queer moments will always be ultimately contingent on how the dualism of subject/other is negotiated within live performance. So queer moments potentially emerge when contradictions are negotiated to produce powerful paradoxes, and are as much a matter of interpretation and reception as they are of representation and production. This chapter will investigate in further detail how these processes of negotiation might be understood as *acts of translation*.

Acts of Translation

Acts of translation arguably may be considered to exist in a variety of contexts: for example, between languages, between cultures, as well as being a way of mediating between scholarly fields and across creative disciplines; and, more specifically for this thesis, between theory and practice or writing and performance, for instance. It is a notorious factor of translating between languages that, though some mutual understanding may be reached between the parties, 'something' will often get lost in translation. Considering translation from this perspective, especially in the context of this thesis, strongly implies that 'meaning' can often exceed language and representation. That is because what is lost from the 'original' suggests something beside/beyond the linguistic structures of the language of translation: that which cannot be made culturally intelligible merely through its lexicon. Therefore, potentially, acts of translation might highlight how 'meaning' and difference might be negotiated at the limits of representation whilst simultaneously producing some sense of the excesses that exist beyond these limits. What might such negotiations and 'linguistic excesses' tell us about 'seeing feelingly'?

The negotiations of translation in performance are processes that carry the potential of paradox. First, because new connections can be gained through loss; and second, because these connections are produced through language's incapacity to fully represent that loss, despite being the only medium through which that failure can be acknowledged. To attempt to frame this process in a proper paradox: *when translation communicates, language fails successfully*. I will argue the process that must take place to negotiate this difference may, of course, be intensely ethical.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler explores 'cultural translation' as a way of 'producing a multicultural understanding of women or, indeed, of society' (2004: 228). Translation is thereby viewed as a process of negotiation within a shifting field of contradictory cultural multiplicity. Therefore, it emerges as a series of ethical negotiations between subject/other. Similarly, in *Translation Studies* (2002) Susan Bassnett considers how 'Homi Bhabha uses the term "translation" not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in the etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another' (2002: 6). Translation is a metaphorical condition of the contemporary world and fundamental to politics within the 'international community': 'we should remember that it is in the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the *in-between* space, that carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (Bhabha, 1994: 38).

Following on from this, it might also be useful to investigate what else, apart from location and society, might be considered as a cultural 'place' when approaching the act of translation as a 'sense of being carried from one place to another'? For example, what of the mediation between theory/practice? Jill Dolan's *Geographies of Learning* (2001) offers a meditation on this subject and argues that it is important to translate the language of high theory into other non-academic contexts. This is because 'if progressive thinking takes public pedagogy as a common goal, such translations might become routine in practical, political ways in wider contexts. The onus is on progressive academics to maintain several audiences' (2001: 6).

This invocation of the audience brings us to how ‘translation’ might also relate to performance, which inevitably will engender issues of theory and practice. Geraldine Harris argues that ‘a written interpretation of a performance is, in effect, a translation from one sort of “language” or set of codes to another, and jokes notoriously “get lost” in translation’ (1999: 4). In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan also notes a similar loss: ‘To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself ... performance critics [must] realize that the labor to write about performance (and thus to ‘preserve’ it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event’ (1993: 148). Interestingly, recent books on translation do not include this definition. In both Bassnett’s *Translation Studies* (2002) and *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha, 2009), references to translation within the context of theatre and performance only discuss it in relation to the difficulties that arise in translating literary texts. However, as these difficulties emerge because ‘the text is only one element in the totality of theatre discourse’ (Bassnett, 2002: 130), it stands to reason that the same difficulties are apparent in ‘translating’ the experience of live performance – the totality of an experiential event – back into the text of a written document. Because this thesis is partly an attempt to mediate subjective experience into ‘wider contexts’ as encouraged by Dolan above, *translation* becomes a pertinent issue for queer moments.

This chapter will investigate translation from all three of the main perspectives noted above – language, culture and performance – but through considering it in terms of a *two-way* negotiation between languages, between cultures, and between text and

performance. It asks why translation might illuminate how the contradictions of bodily autonomy can be negotiated in performance, and how this could shed light on why ephemeral queer moments are political.

Attempts On Her Life

To examine these issues I will adopt two contrasting approaches to the same play: a close reading of the original English-language text of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* (2007) and an analysis of the play in performance in a Welsh-language translation by Owen Martell: *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi*. This was produced by Sherman Cymru and premiered as part of the National Eisteddfod, at Bala in August 2009; I attended a performance at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff in September 2009. In investigating the play from the multiple perspectives discussed so far in this chapter, I will be moving between languages and cultures, as well as the play as text and the play as embodied performance. The contradictions that this will inevitably generate will be a crucial factor for analysing how acts of translation might produce queer moments in performance. Through juxtaposing these different perspectives on the play, I hope to grasp the political potential that exists between language and materiality, and to show how the contradictions of bodily autonomy, potentially, can indicate transformations of both subject and other.

The English-language text of Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* (2007) was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1997 – later revived for the National Theatre in 2007, directed by Katie Mitchell – and it has been translated into over twenty languagesⁱ (*aside*). As contradictions and paradoxes are a constant theme of

this thesis, one way to usefully consider the text is as a meditation on contradiction.

The play consists of seventeen scenes, varying in length, all exploring multiple aspects of a woman called Anne. At times her name also mutates slightly: Anya, Annie, anny and Annushka. Despite an element of consistency in these nominal variations, the entirely absent protagonist – ‘she’ never appears as a speaking character – remains a complete enigma due to the multiplicity of ‘her’ identities.

During these seventeen scenes she may be interpreted, as Aleks Sierz points out, as a recipient of a variety of telephone messages, the European heroine of a film, a victim of civil war, a typical consumer as denoted by letters which generally address ‘The Occupier’, a megastar, a tourist guide, a make of car, a physicist, an international terrorist, an American survivalist, an artist, a refugee’s dead child, a victim of aliens, the girl next door, the object of a police investigation, a porn star, and finally, the subject of a conversation among friends (Sierz, 2006: 5). Her ages fluctuate between ‘fourteen perhaps or younger still’ (71) and possibly fifty, given that the last scene mentions ‘the classic texts she should’ve read as a student twenty or thirty years ago’ (84). Sometimes the focus on her identity shifts from being single, partnered, a mother or a daughter. She also emerges in various parts of the globe as the play covers a wide geographic range, including European capitals, North African Countries as well as ‘other’ un-named but seemingly non-Western continents. This international dimension is further emphasised as ‘The New Anny’ (Scene 7) and ‘Pornó’ (Scene 16) actually present acts of translation on stage as part of their dramatic structure: the former from an African or Eastern European

language into English, and the latter from English into an African, South American or Eastern European language.

Crimp replaces traditional 'characters' or 'roles' with unnamed 'speakers' and though he assigns where each speaker in performance should begin and end he does not name them; neither does he specify their gender, race, age or number. This is entirely left to the discretion of the director, though Crimp wittily states in a note at the beginning of the text that 'this is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre' (Crimp, 2007: unpaginated). As Dan Reballato argues in a discussion of Crimp's work for the TheatreVoice website, this may be considered a joke against naturalism: such is the multiplicity of the world, it is impossible to mimetically reproduce its conditions on stage (Websites: Theatrevoice). The 'speeches' also variously suggest multiple characters for its narrators, for example: film-makers, parents, art critics, police, border guards, advertisers, translators, lovers and friends.

Despite its fragmentary post-modern aesthetic it would be wrong to interpret the play as having no structure. Some scenes refer to each other and even quote each other and often motifs are repeated, sometimes many times. Sierz notes how the play's structuring is symmetrical: for example, two scenes include translation (as already mentioned), two scenes are conveyed in rhyme – 'The Camera Loves You' (Scene 5) and 'The Girl Next Door' (Scene 14) – and 'Tragedy Of Love and Ideology' (Scene 2) and 'Strangely!' (Scene 12) seem to tell the same story of civil war.

Therefore as a text it appears to bring a semblance of coherence to its multiple inconsistencies. On the one hand 'Anne' is just a vehicle for a series of contrasting clues as to who she might be; while on the other hand the inconsistencies this produces are explored through a seemingly carefully constructed negotiation of dualisms. These techniques could prove to be useful in using the play to explore how queer moments might bring coherence to the multiplicity of performance.

Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi

Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi (2009), Owen Martell's translation of Crimp's play, was first performed at Neuadd Buddug, Bala, as part of the Welsh National Eisteddfod in August 2009 and directed by Arwel Gruffydd. Having opened at this annual festival of music, literature and performance it subsequently toured the country. In performance – which I witnessed at the end of its tour at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff in September 2009 – the play was staged on a set that suggested an expensive hotel suite. Stage centre was a large double bed whilst downstage left was a sofa, glass table and standard lamp. Framing the decadent naturalism of Gerald Tyler's stage design was a series of screens. One large one mounted above the bed and another six smaller ones were stage right of the 'set', though still visible on stage. These were arranged above a table in rows of three, reminiscent of a surveillance operation. Next to the table, the Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) was sitting with her back slightly turned to the audience throughout, and the Assistant Stage Manager (ASM) was also visible next to another table stage right. In addition, Peter Carter from the multimedia band Acid Casuals used record decks and computers to mix the soundtrack to the performance in full-view of the audience,

stage left. Throughout the performance the DSM would speak into a mike, visibly cueing the rest of the technical team from a script, though this was inaudible to the audience. At one point she became fully integrated into the 'performance' as she spoke lines from the text, as if prompting the actors. Similarly, the DSM was intentionally noticeable as she prepared props and often walked through the continuing action to place them on set so that the performers could use them. As Crimp's text self-reflexively investigates how its protagonist is constructed through language, so this production also emphasised the material mechanisms of its own representational frame.

Four actors took part in the production: Aled Pedrick and Catherine Ayers were in their twenties, whilst Clare Hingott and Meilyr Sion were in their thirties. They were Caucasian, smartly dressed and seemed to represent an upwardly mobile Welsh-speaking middle-class. Who they were and why they were together in this room was never established but, together with the stage design, their appearance suggested a suspicious sense of privileged universality.

Through reading the text and analysing the play in performance what can we learn about queer subjectivity? What can we learn about its uses of language and materiality through contrasting and investigating a close reading of the text and its embodiment in practice? What can such 'acts of translation' teach us about the relation of queer moments to political practice? What are the contradictions that emerge through 'translation' and how might they be transformed into paradoxical queer moments?

Of course, addressing all of these questions in one go is a tall order. The methods I will employ, however, in the following analysis should help focus these questions further and progress my argument with regards to translation. Initially focusing on the play's contradictions, I will ask how its text and performance might insinuate a queer resistance to the hierarchies of language, representation and the other, thus demonstrating the impossible within embodied politics. I will argue that both text and performance suggest that queer subjectivity is utopian because of the contradictions of bodily autonomy. Of course this is in conflict with what I have been arguing so far in this thesis, which is that such dualisms might be negotiated to produce a ghost of the queer subject through the queer moments of transformative exchange. Reflecting on this conflict, I will also argue that the text simultaneously makes the case for re-politicising materiality, reflecting the desires of queer performance scholars such as Case (2009) and Dolan (1993; 2001 and 2005) to find a way to politically negotiate deconstructive approaches with embodied (though contingent) politics, as analysed in the thesis' Chapter 1. I will investigate how the text and performance also suggest the importance of 'seeing feelingly', as explored in the last chapter. These interpretations of the play and text overall seem to produce a contradiction in the text/productions between the 'problem' of chiasmic materiality vs. the inescapable necessity of [embodied] politics.

Finally I will explore the way both text and performance offer models for how a double-edged negotiation of this contradiction might work in practice. I will ask how variable acts of translation – linguistic, cultural and in-between text and practice;

between Crimp's play as text and the Welsh-language performance – demonstrate the forms of embodied negotiations that live performance might usefully explore. These translations between contingent positions might well lead to a better understanding of queer moments.

The Absent Ghost: the impossible queer subject

Text: *Attempts on her life*¹

Across seventeen scenes, differentiated by titles, an attempt is made by a series of narrators to produce 'the perfect story to encapsulate our time' – so the cover 'blurb' of the play text claims. In trying to create the perfect story, the elusive subject of its absent protagonist continuously slips through their fingers: 'Attempts to describe her? Attempts to destroy her? Or attempts to destroy herself? Is Anne the object of violence? Or its terrifying practitioner?' (Crimp, 2007). In 'The Girl Next Door' (Scene 14), the text reflects the multiple forms of its chameleon protagonist at various moments during the play's trajectory, announcing:

She practises art

She's a refugee

In a horse and cart.

She's a pornographic movie star

A killer and a brand of car

¹ These additional subheadings are meant to clarify the focus of the analysis, distinguishing between Crimp's text and the Welsh-language performance.

A KILLER AND A BRAND OF CAR!

(2007: 65)²

The narrators' accounts of Anne, Anya, Annie or even at one point a new model of car called anny, produces a sense of a subject that is in a continual process of transformation. As Sierz wittily suggests, Anne is a vehicle like the car she at one point 'becomes' (2006: 52). Every time the narrative of a scene presents the semblance of a coherent identity, another produces an incongruous juxtaposition.

Sometimes scenes do produce similarities of situation or theme, for example in 'Mum and Dad' (Scene 6) she is a daughter who has committed suicide whilst in 'Untitled (100 Words)' (Scene 11) she is an artist exhibiting a variety of objects associated with her own 'attempts on her life':

What we see here are various objects associated with the artist's attempts to kill herself over the past few months. For example: medicine bottles, records of hospital admissions, Polaroids of the several HIV positive men with whom she has had intentionally unprotected intercourse, pieces of broken glass...

(51)

'Tragedy of Love and Ideology' (Scene 2) also concludes with a version of Anne who has sexual intercourse without protection (16). Such seemingly connected fragments

² All further references to the playscript will indicate page numbers only.

might encourage an audience to draw conclusions about who Anne might really be across the seventeen scenes. However, any desire to construct a stable narrative of subjectivity – further impelled by the variations on the name ‘Anne’ – is variously confounded. This is most notable in ‘The New Anny’ (Scene 7) when the absent protagonist, as previously mentioned, transforms into ‘the aerodynamic body of the new *Anny*’, which ‘comes with electric windows as standard’ (2006: 36). So, even if the text sometimes produces a coherent subject, its fixity is soon rendered unstable and unravels. How can Anne be a victim of civil war in the one instant (17-22) and a megastar in the next (25-26)?

Therefore, through these juxtapositions, the text of *Attempts on her Life* investigates what one of the narrators declares is ‘the inadequacy of words’ (19). The ever changing but absent ‘Anne’ is a theatrical device that indicates how subjectivity is constructed through language, but any suggested cohesive coherence of the subject is an illusion; there will always be that which exceeds representation. Though it is only through the compromise of language and representation that subjects can be known – ‘Anne’ can only exist through language and the models constructed by others – who she ‘really’ is, the ‘excess of truth’ of her subjectivity, remains a mystery.

I have investigated throughout this thesis the contradictions of bodily autonomy: that there is an ‘excess’ of materiality that exists through and beyond a body that is primarily recognised through language and the other, and yet we can only recognise this ‘excess’ via language. How the seeming impossible queer subjectivity might be

achieved despite these contradictions has been a primary focus of investigation. If 'Anne' never emerges as a stable subject, does 'she' – or in fact her absence; a kind of ghost – enact a form of queer resistance? My primary concern, however, has been to explore how queer subjectivity might be embodied. So does 'Anne's' absence propose that it is only through 'disembodiment' that queer subjectivity can be articulated?

Performance: *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi*

Certainly one interpretation of *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* in performance might also suggest that the queer subject is a utopian construct. For example, in staging 'Untitled (100 words)', the four actors gathered together on the sofa to discuss 'Anne's' art exhibition. Their presentation and mannerisms reminded me of the *Late Review* discussions, where a regular panel were gathered for the BBC's *The Late Show* (1989-1995) to discuss and critique the most recent literary publications, art exhibitions, performances or films. This seemed an appropriate response to the intellectualised debate suggested by the text:

- ...Where does the 'life' – literally in this case – end, and the 'work' begin?
- With respect to you I think she'd find the whole concept of 'making a point' ludicrously outmoded.

(52)

Indeed, this parody of *The Late Show* was also adopted by Katie Mitchell's production for the National Theatre where two actors impersonated Tom Paulin and Germaine Greer who would often appear on the programme (Websites: Fisher).

Also relevant to my argument is how the live action would be interrupted at several points by a series of words flashed in quick succession on the large screen above the bed. I have included the original English-language translation for this example here, though of course these words were not used in the Welsh-language production³:

Pen (head)
gwyrdd (green)
dŵr (water)
canu (to sing)
marwolaeth (death)
hir (long)
llong (ship)
talu (to pay)
fffenest (window)
cyfeillgar (friendly)
bwrdd (table)
gofyn (to ask)
oer (cold)
bonyn (stern)

³ This production did not include sur-titles for non-Welsh speakers.

dawnsio (to dance)

pentref (village)

llyn (lake)

sâl (sick)

balchder (pride)

coginio (to cook)

(Martell, 2009: 53-54/Crimp: 51-52)

At various junctures in the scene, similar catalogues of words appeared with the last series concluding rather ominously: ‘mis, neis, menyw, cam-drin (month, nice, woman, to abuse)’ (Martell, 2009: 60/Crimp: 57-58).

In a critical essay on the play, ‘Short circuits of desire’, academic Clara Escoda Agusti argues that such instances suggest that ‘subjectivity may be found precisely in the disintegration of opposed dualisms and categories through which one escapes the categorizations and roles one is forced to adopt’ (Websites: Agusti). The ‘concrete poems’, as she calls them, express a subjectivity that is not hierarchically organised. For example, the verbs in their infinite form suggest pure activity; a ‘subject’ is not inscribed in the text. This is why she argues that ‘the infinitive is a response to the semantic properties of gender and number (“she” and “her”) through which Anne is constantly referred’ (Website: Agusti).

In this interpretation, a ‘queer subjectivity’ can only be realised as words on a screen. This form of resistance to the contradictions of bodily autonomy, through

the disintegration of linguistic and subjective dualisms, implies that such subjectivity can only be achieved through the erasure of the material body. Hence the technique suggests that bodily autonomy is no more than a utopian construct produced by linguistic abstraction, and this seems to deny the possibility of a mutually beneficial negotiation of subjectivity through embodied politics.

This interpretation of subversive subjectivity as potentially produced by the play was further implied throughout the performance of *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* because, true to the text, 'Anne' never emerged as an embodied character on stage. This denial of corporeal representation again could well suggest incommensurability between queer subjectivity and embodied practice. Four actors – two male, two female – narrated her multiple identities from a third person perspective, but 'Anne' embodied never materialised. Such incommensurability could be taken to mean that it is impossible to perform a queer negotiation of agency through language and representation because the body is always already trapped within the language of the other.

Seeing Feelingly: 'the face'

I would like to rescue Crimp's text from this interpretation, which suggests that 'materiality' is a problem for ethico-political resistance because bodily autonomy and queer subjectivity are utopian impossibilities, by investigating an alternative: the text emphasises how important it is to find a way to politicise materiality.

Let us first return to those final four words of the 'concrete poems': 'mis, neis, menyw, cam-drin (month, nice, woman, to abuse)' (Martell, 2009: 60/Crimp: 57-58).

What is interesting here is that by staging a queer resistance through disembodiment, the text projected in performance still concluded by referring to an act of violation: to abuse. Even when abstracted, subjective resistance ultimately returns to an idea of subjective violation. This might suggest that it is imperative to find a way to negotiate between linguistic/representational deconstruction and material practice. If such mediation does not take place, discursive and material violations will continue regardless. Might this be a call to re-politicise materiality?

In addition, an alternative interpretation may suggest *Attempts on her Life* implicitly recognises that common human vulnerability can provide a 'foundation' for an ethics of resistance and/or transformation. That is to say, humans need it in order to create 'frames of recognition' that encourage them to 'see feelingly' as a means for performing ethically, i.e. non-violently. This idea has already been explored in the previous chapter, but before returning to the play text I would like to develop a more nuanced understanding of what it might mean to 'see feelingly'. I will approach this by engaging with Judith Butler's interpretation of Emmanuel Levinas' notion of 'the face' (Levinas: 1985; 1986 and 1996).

In Chapter 1 I discussed how Butler argues that non-violence is a normative aspiration that allows queer theory to move beyond the realm of linguistic abstraction into a philosophy of freedom, and that, through this, queer subjectivity can have a place in embodied politics. On the one hand, this approach incorporates a mode of double-edged thinking that, on the one hand, recognises that subjects must primarily be constituted through language, and that language will inevitably limit and

exclude other subjects. On the other hand, to move queer theory beyond the paralysis of deconstructive circumlocution, a norm of non-violence must be created, and recognising common human vulnerability is key to establishing this norm. Butler's investigations into Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the 'face' suggests how common human vulnerability can be established as an ethical 'foundation' for human relations.

To summarise again, the Levinasian 'face', according to Butler, can produce the most basic mode of responsibility. It produces a need to respond to the other, which interrupts the human impulse for self-survival based on violence. The face announces an ethical relation beyond language because the imperative it conveys is not immediately translatable into a linguistic formulation: it is fundamentally chiasmic. To repeat Butler's key claim: 'it is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks *the limits of linguistic translation here*' (2006: 134, emphasis added). This chiasmus is captured in the formulation of Levinas's utterance that is less and more than a sentence: 'the face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other' (1996: 167). Butler views the avoidance of the verb as enacting a sort of suspension, where the face is not collapsible into the subjective essentialism that the completed sentence might suggest.

This suspension is a linguistic attempt to momentarily 'stall' the ongoing backwards and forwards motion of the chiasmic struggle. I argue that queer moments in performance might emerge as similar suspensions within that struggle; as performative paradoxes that illuminate an ethical negotiation, which the

inadequacies of conventionally grammatical (i.e. classically logical) language fail to capture⁴. Queer moments shine a light on the Levinasian face of humanity through the non/human. In addition, Butler also suggests that Levinas 'gives us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation and humanization, a relationship that is not as straightforward as we might think' (2006: 14). That is because representation can both produce the conditions through which the face can, or fails to, emerge; there is a 'domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly' (2006: 140). That is especially relevant because this thesis is interested in the conditions most likely to produce queer moments.

If queer moments and the Levinasian face are related, what can the text of *Attempts on her Life* (2007) tell us about the conditions most likely to allow the 'face' to emerge? If there is a 'domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly', what can the text indicate to us about this domain? For me, the answer lies in how the many variations of 'Anne' emerge against the backdrop of a global, mediatised culture.

Global Mediatised Culture

In the text, 'Anne' is a contradictory 'global citizen'. In 'Tragedy of Love and Ideology' (Scene 2) she is an elegant European bourgeois; in the following 'Faith in Ourselves' (Scene 3) she is a possible third-world victim of civil war: 'the harmony of generations has been destroyed. The women have been raped. The little children

⁴ For a further discussion on the relationship between paradoxes and classical logic cf. *Theatre Ecology* (Kershaw, 2007).

have been disembowelled' (18). In 'Mum and Dad' (Scene 6) she is a Western traveller constantly on the move and 'always in a departure lounge' (28): the world becomes a list of names as the countries she has visited are reeled off in quick succession including Brazil, Cuba, Romania, Nigeria, Florida, Australia, New Zealand (29). That exact sequence is repeated later on in the scene, giving the sense that the globe can be reduced to an ordered list: manageable and repeatable (32). A world of complex cultural differences is equated to a global supermarket shopping-list.

This notion becomes even more pronounced in 'The Threat Of International Terrorism™' (Scene 9). The trademark symbol incorporated into the title appears to make its claims on several other 'objects' within the scene: Anne used to play with Fantasy Barbie™ and Fantasy Ken™ and even prayed to God™ nightly, but now she has evolved from this child into a terrorist. International terrorism is therefore considered within the context of a world where an image of idealised sexual difference is turned into commodity and the seeming binary opposition of morality and violence, personified as God and Terror, can also be appropriated for capitalist gain. From this perspective it seems that capitalism will take advantage of opposing dualisms and nothing can escape its invading conformism: it universalises through a 'fantasy' of absolute difference, which can spread throughout the world.

Yet whilst Crimp's play presents capitalism as an invasive backdrop there is also an implied critique of its teleological and encroaching global narrative. If the play is concerned with how there is not just one way of telling the story of Anne's subjectivity, it surely also suggests that there cannot be one global and universalising

narrative of capitalism. What is more, Crimp's decision to include an unreferenced quotation from Jean Baudrillard's writing as an introduction to the play text immediately sets in motion an interrogation of how that narrative is produced globally: 'No one will have directly experienced the actual cause of such happenings, but everyone will have received an image of them.' Here, live events are experienced through mediated images (and vice versa of course, as Auslander attests). Crimp's text also consistently draws our attention to a global mediated culture and explores how subjects are 'framed' within this culture and how that will often compromise our ability to see them feelingly.

Textual Frames

'Anne' is consistently mediated through a lens in Crimp's text. In 'Faith in Ourselves' (Scene 3), Anya's civil war appears to be mediated through a panning movie camera as a narrator tells us at one point that they witness a 'panorama of the whole valley' (20). In 'The Camera Loves You' (Scene 5), the rhymed sequence, which constructs Anne as a megastar, announces 'the camera *loves* you, the camera *loves* you, the camera *loves* you' (25). In 'Mum and Dad' (Scene 6) she smiles back at her parents from countless photos taken around the world (29). In 'Kinda Funny' (Scene 10), the logic of realism, in what otherwise seems like a straightforward monologue reporting the tale of a son returning to his alcoholic mother, is interrupted. 'Annie' is yet again mediated through a lens:

And out the window there's like this dusty pick-up with two tiny tiny
kids in the back like kinda staring. Just staring into the camera. And

she can hardly believe these are her very own grandchildren. Then he says, “Mom, I want you to meet Annie”.

(48)

It seems that the protagonist transforms not only through linguistic frames, but also often through the filter of mediated perception. Anne’s absent subjectivity is therefore viewed through/against a backdrop of global mediated culture.

Moreover, such mediated framing might work to distort our ability to see such subjects feelingly. In ‘Faith in Ourselves’ (Scene 3) Anya is a victim of civil war but all the information the narrators say they need in order to construct a sense of her subjectivity is ‘all there in her face. In Anya’s face. We don’t need words. She’s beyond words. Her mouth, in fact her mouth trembles but no words come. The inadequacy of words’ (2006: 19). Might this suggest the common human vulnerability of a Levinasian face, the chiasmus of language and materiality as a condition of an ethical negotiation between Anne and the narrators? However, this is not a live encounter but rather, as the phrase ‘panorama of the whole valley’ suggests, the narrators’ experience of Anya’s civil war as mediated through a lens (2006: 20). The effect of which might be understood through the scene’s concluding meditation on empathy:

- Anya’s trees are *our* trees. Anya’s family is the family to which we all belong.
- So it’s a universal thing *obviously*.

- It's a universal thing in which we recognise, we strangely recognise ourselves. Our own world. Our own pain.
- Our own anger.
- A universal thing which strangely...what? What? What?
- Which strangely restores.
- Which strangely restores – I think it does – yes – our faith in ourselves.

(21-22)

At first glance this might suggest that the 'face' has indeed emerged to produce an empathetic encounter. Yet, this is not a face that produces an ethical negotiation between subject/other: these dualisms remain intact. Here, the narrators intellectually appropriate the suffering experienced by Anya to re-establish their own sense of selves: 'Our own world. Our own pain. Our own anger...our faith in ourselves' (21-22). There is no 'punctum' here as experienced by Jones in the presence of Franko B, which connects spectators to their subject whilst still maintaining the cultural specificity that differentiates them. Here again is the assumption of a global universalising narrative that attempts to eradicate difference. This narrative restores the narrators' sense of subjectivity in hierarchical relation to the mediated image. In this sense the frame simultaneously humanises and dehumanises the face in its moment of mediated consumption.

Recognising the 'Face'

In the previous chapter I explored how representation might work to blur what Butler identifies as 'frames of recognition' (2009: 6). How might we produce frames of recognition that allow us to see the full complexity of the Levinasian face? As Butler asks: 'how do we come to know the difference between the inhuman but humanizing face, for Levinas, and the dehumanization that can also take place through the face' (2006: 141).

Such a process of dehumanization seems to be explored by Crimp in 'Mum and Dad' (Scene 6) when they describe how Anne, as a child, felt like a TV screen:

...where everything from the front looks real and alive, but round the back there's just dust and a few wires...she says she's not a real character, not a real character like you get in a book or on TV, but a *lack* of character, an *absence* she calls it, doesn't she, of character. An absence of character, whatever *that* means...*Then* she wants to be a terrorist, doesn't she.

(31)

With this reference to terrorism, Anne becomes indicative of the way we might be encouraged to see the 'face' of 'terror' as an absent subject. For example, in the case of George Bush II's War on Terror – first announced in a television address to a joint session on congress, September 20, 2001 – the face of Osama Bin Laden was commonly distributed as a terroristic image through the global media. It was as if Evil

was personified 'through a face that is supposed to be, to capture, to contain the very idea for which it stands' (Butler, 2006: 145).

In these circumstances it is not the Levinasian face that emerges, because representation works ideologically to mask a sense of a common human vulnerability; our proximity to a shared materiality – the feeling body – which cannot be reduced to language and representation, is erased through mediating technology. This, potentially, clarifies the perspective I explored in the last chapter: representation can work to blur frames of recognition that ideologically distance or even erase a sense of common human vulnerability. Mediatized frames can effectively limit perspective and through these conditions diminish the capacity for subject/objects to see or be seen feelingly, *disallowing* the face of a subject (in the Levinasian sense) to emerge.

Of course, in Crimp's text, as the continual transformation of 'Anne' suggests, the subject cannot be reduced to the dehumanised subject of terror. In fact, as the above passage which describes 'Anne's' sense of absence insinuates, the failure to recognise common human vulnerability (the face), or to encourage representations which blur the frames of recognition that might allow us to experience it, will also encourage further processes of destruction in an ongoing circle of violence: after all, 'Anne', having experienced the sensation of being viewed as an absent subject, wants to become a terrorist.

Frames of recognition work to establish what becomes culturally intelligible as 'human' and what is excluded from this paradigm: the inhuman, the animal, the abject. The frames operate to establish a normative scheme of recognition: 'what will and will not be human, what will be a liveable life, what will be a grievable death' (Butler, 2006: 146). Mainstream media can be monopolised to control and maintain the concerns of contemporary governmental warfare, producing the types of frames that foreclose what might be considered as 'human', and thus severely limiting the possibilities of seeing feelingly. To see feelingly is to witness subjectivity at the limits of language and representation in order to evoke, potentially at least, a challenge to the violence these processes of mediation might produce and reinforce.

Hence, in her conclusion to *Precarious Life* (2006) Butler asks: what media will allow this mode of seeing? What media might enable us to comprehend the full complexity of the Levinasian face? I am suggesting that she is asking how language and representation might work to reveal the feeling body, which in the terms of this thesis translates into asking how representation might work to reveal the paradox of bodily autonomy:

There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and *that paradox must be retained in the representation we give*.

In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational

practice. The face is not 'effaced' in its failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility.

(2006: 144; emphasis added)

As a representational practice, theatre will always be limited. But in live performance queer moments may emerge as performative instances in which paradox is retained through the representations theatre gives. That is when the 'face' emerges *through* the limits of representation, and the subject/other – despite constituting the dualism of agonistic contradiction – can see feelingly.

Having moved from text to performance and back again, a major contradiction has been identified. The text of Crimp's play suggests how materiality needs to be politicised *and* how frames of recognition can themselves blur our ability to see feelingly. And yet the play in performance depended on a disembodied protagonist and framed 'her' so that 'she' was beyond recognition: an absent subject. However, live performance is itself often an especially contradictory affair. That is why I will next turn to how both text and performance of Crimp's play operates/operated to demonstrate a resistant/transformative negotiation of such dualisms. Hence I ask: what connections might be made between queer moments in performance and the potential of 'translation' to productively negotiate the dualisms of language/materiality and subject/other?

Embodied Resistance/Transformation

First I will focus on the possible contradictions that emerge when interpreting a scene from the text of *Attempts on her Life*, and then I will consider how the scene was realised in the performance of *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* (2009). The text of 'The New Anny' (Scene 7) specifically uses an act of linguistic translation as the medium through which the scene is presented. 'Anne' is represented as a fast, sleek and aerodynamic car and the scene unfolds in the form of an advertisement. A stage direction specifies that it is '*first spoken in an African or Eastern European language. [and] An English translation immediately follows*' (36).

'Anny' is framed as a truly international car, because by Scene 7 'Anne' has emerged as a global citizen. *Anny* might be found on the Brooklyn Bridge, crossing the Sahara, meandering through the vineyards of Bordeaux or even 'streaking' through North African Villages. Though I repeat the invoked specter of nude that appears in the text, however faintly, this metaphor exposes a contrasting notion of subjectivity to that proposed by the naked bodies revealed/confessed in the performances by Lazlo Pearlman and Franko B, investigated in Chapters 2 and 3. Whereas both Lazlo and Franko B's work potentially offer a challenge to the dualisms of language and representation through which subjectivities are recognised, 'Anny' arguably attempts to establish and perpetuate hierarchies of absolute difference.

'Anny' is fast, sleek, free, secure, and crucially, in control. Safety is a paramount feature with 'driver's and passenger's airbag as standard' so that 'children will be safe and happy in the back seat of the *Anny* just as the adults will be relaxed and

confident at the wheel' (37). Furthermore she not only protects within but also protects from without: 'There is ... no room for gypsies, Arabs, Jews, Turks, Kurds, Blacks or any of that human scum' (39). The back seat of the car will never be made slippery by sperm, blood, beer, and saliva, or sticky by melted chocolate. The *Anny* is therefore vigorously defended, metaphorically suggesting a fascist ideal of normative subjectivity. Because the car is protected by armour from the outside world, this firmly delineated boundary suggests a non-negotiable dualistic relation between those 'within' and those 'without'; 'subject' and 'other' are hierarchically divided. 'Anny' as 'car' gradually produces a metaphor for a 'legitimate' subjectivity that is ethically problematic: there is implicit violence in 'her' drive – pun intended – to exclude difference. Given such extremely exclusive powers, how can radical intimacy in performance possibly disturb or deconstruct such boundaries?

In reading the text, one might assume that the act of translation between the African or Eastern European language and English would similarly function in a hierarchic way. Any negotiation in the process of 'what is being said' seems limited as the 'English translation immediately follows':

- [phrase]
- There is no room in the *Anny* for the degenerate races ...
- [phrase]
- ... for the mentally deficient ...
- [phrase]

- ... or the physically imperfect.

(39)

This might imply that the English-speaking translator is complicit in articulating fascist ideas: the first speaker appears to be in 'control' of the linguistic enunciations. Does this sequence therefore demonstrate how linguistic translation might produce a 'form of violation in cases where it forces a specific perspective of events' (Websites: Agusti)? This might certainly be one interpretation. However, in the performance of *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* at the Sherman Theatre in 2009, another possibility materialised.

As I watched this scene the footage of what appeared to be a car advert appeared on the several on-stage screens. The four performers were gathered together on the sofa: they seemed comfortable and relaxed, as if enjoying an evening in with friends. They watched the same footage on a laptop that was placed on the table. We followed the journey of what indeed appeared to be a fast and sleek car whilst listening to a voice-over in South-American Spanish, speaking the text that would then immediately be translated into Welsh by Claire Hingott.

Interestingly, the text of the Welsh-language version differs in its stage directions for translation: '*Ileferir pop araith mewn iaith Ewropeaidd i ddechrau* (each speech is first spoken in a European language), as opposed to the African or European language suggested in the original. In conversation with the director Arwel Gruffydd after the event he explained to me that this was because he thought that the use of African or European language in the original incorporated a 'marginal' linguistic perspective,

which countered the 'dominant' English perspective of the text. As Welsh is an especially 'minority' language, he wanted to reverse the terms of this interpretation through using an alternative 'dominant' language in this sequence.

Of course, reversing these terms produced different political resonances. Despite the fact that this was South-American Spanish – as I learnt from the director after the event – to my untrained ear I only detected that it was 'Spanish'. This meant that together with the images that appeared on the screens, which seemed to be set distinctly in a Mediterranean environment, the scene had a Western European quality about it. With its four Caucasian, Welsh-speaking western European actors, had these acts of translations been delivered as 'imitation' of the original, it could have suggested a complicit substantiation of a white-supremacist position. Such racism would be made explicit in the line that denounces 'sipsiwn, Arabiaid, Iddewon, Twrciaid, Cwrdiaid, Duon nac unrhyw faw dynol arall' (gypsies, Arabs, Jews, Turks, Kurds, Blacks or any of that human scum) (Martell, 2009: 39/Crimp: 39). However in the hands of director Arwel Gruffydd and the actress Claire Hingott a form of embodied resistance transpired. Although, as the text requests, she spoke immediately following the Spanish announcements, her tone, playfulness and embodiment of those words offered a counteracting perspective on interpretation to that of the original text's dominant-ideological implications of subservience and fascist complicity. As the scene progressed and her translations became increasingly fascistic in content, her light-hearted intonations suggested a reflexive questioning of what she was 'translating'. Here, her use of laughter and ironic emphasis, for example, produced a tangible gap between the words she enunciated and her

relation to those words. Through embodying the 'text' in this way, was the actress finding a form of playful resistance – even some kind of transformative energy - despite having to negotiate a highly oppressive language that was not her own? It was evident, that though 'she' spoke these words, the actress' interpretation and delivery of the speaker's text delivered a sense of ironic (i.e. doubled) reflexivity, which opened up an 'embodied critique' of the 'meaning' of the actual words through a combination of tone, gesture and physicality.

As mentioned in the Introduction, if something gets 'lost' in translation one has to acknowledge that *speech*, and perhaps especially in the language act of translation, may exceed that language: here is a form of communication that potentially cannot be made *entirely* culturally intelligible. Indeed, my struggle here to describe accurately and precisely *how* this 'meaning' may have been embodied and mediated for me as a spectator could be indicative of that fact. Was the actress, like Lazlo and Franko B, finding a way to 'mean' at or even beyond the limits of language? Were Hingott and Gruffydd finding a way to challenge the hierarchic dualisms of subject/other implied by the text (as represented between the 'original' normative language and the transitive language of translation), by negotiating language through present 'materiality'? Certainly what seemed to be 'lost' – or at least diluted – was the impact and 'intention' of extreme racism. In addition, it became evident that this 'loss' was produced by an embodied interpretation that language itself cannot fully represent, though of course, it is the only medium through which I can acknowledge that failure in a context – an academic thesis – where *speech* normally is not available. The actress demonstrated a form of embodied practice that through

linguistic translation, attempted to negotiate the dualisms of subjectivity in order to imply resistance and, possibly, some kind of transformation⁵. However, as the voice was pre-recorded and the actress was live, the negotiation in this specific sequence was somewhat one-sided. So how might such a process function in a two-way negotiation, and what might that tell us about live performance and queer moments?

Cultural Translation

In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Butler suggests that the only way to reconsider and rearticulate the basic categories of ontology – for example what is culturally intelligible within the categories of gender, sex and the human – is to submit oneself/ourselves to a process of cultural translation. She writes, ‘it is crucial to recognize that the notion of the human will only be built over time in and by the process of cultural translation, where it is not a translation between two languages that stay enclosed, distinct, unified’ (2004: 38). It is only through existing in a mode of constant translation – a process of continual negotiation – that multicultural understanding of such categories might be extended. Driven by an ethic of disarming non-violence, processes of translation might resist/transform at the limits of cultural intelligibility, moving through and beyond such ontological exclusions.

In *Precarious Life* (2006), considering the consequences of September 11, 2001 Butler analyses how cultural translation might generate multiple perspectives which could assist a movement beyond the narrative of revenge encouraged by the US

⁵ The gendering of this collaborative process is also worth noting, as it involved a female 'performer' and a male 'director' seemingly working well, probably through creative 'negotiation', together.

government and military in response to the event (2006: 1-18). She argues that the call to war was facilitated by the way a moral position was adopted, from which it was possible to view those who performed the 'atrocities' as acting from a position of 'terror' and 'evil.'⁶ This dualistic perspective can only emerge when cultural identity is viewed as a first-person narrative:

In order to condemn these acts as inexcusable, absolutely wrong, in order to sustain the affective structure in which we are, on the one hand, victimized and, on the other, engaged in a righteous cause of rooting out terror, we have to begin the story with the experience of violence we suffered.

We have to shore up the first-person point of view, and preclude from the telling accounts that might involve a decentering of the narrative "I" within the international political domain.

(2006: 6-7)

The fictional 'I' of America emerged through that process as the exclusive object of violation. As a result of '9/11' the vulnerability of this assumed central position had been revealed. The response was to rectify this 'decentering' through committing to a narrative that would re-centre 'their' position once again (2006: 7): through a war on the 'axis of evil'. Butler notes that producing this fiction 'compensates for the enormous narcissistic wound opened up by the public display of our physical

⁶ Similarly, David Cameron nominated the recent riots in the UK as 'criminality pure and simple' (Websites: Cameron).

vulnerability' (2006: 7). Adoption of this tactic eradicates a sense of common human vulnerability that is *shared* between 'violators' and 'victims': cultural dualisms are retained and perpetuated in a vicious circle of violence.

Rather than utilising the decentering of the first-person narrative in the service of revenge, Butler asks whether this narrative might be galvanized in a more progressive way. This is because as global actors, acting in historically established fields, 'we will need to emerge from the narrative perspective of US unilateralism and, as it were, its defensive structures, to consider the ways in which our lives are profoundly implicated in the lives of others' (2006: 7). In principle, the ability to find ways of narrating oneself/ourselves not merely from the position of the first-person, but simultaneously from other positions, is a way to begin such a process. I have been investigating such a process throughout this thesis via doubled reflexivity (with strong paradox as a paradigm) and its potential production of a shift from resistant to transformative versions of 'freedom'. To be able to receive contradictory accounts narrated from the second person, or even to view our experience from the perspective of a third one, 'can actually work to expand our understanding of the forms that global power has taken' (2006: 8).

Performing Translations

From this perspective, instead of viewing *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* (2009) as a performance that denied the possibility of a queer-inflected material practice, it could be viewed instead as an experiment in *contingent essentialism* as the narrators explore multiple positions beyond a reified first-person narrative. So, as Lazlo performed the

‘monopolylogue’ to investigate the contradictory positions of gender and sex and explore the fluidity of cultural identities, so here we have an example of a collective monopolylogue: a mono/polylogue perhaps, because it still insinuates an individualised ‘subject’ but through a multi-perspective collective of positions and narrators.

Sue Ellen-Case identifies the queer potential of a similar theatrical form:

The choreopoem is a theatrical form created by Chicanas and black women. These are performance pieces composed of loosely related poems and performed by ensembles. In this collection of poems, the performer is not a character, though she may, for a short time, suggest one. As the lyric voice moves among the several performers in the ensemble, they collectively enact the agency, or the lyric dynamic. Sometimes the performer inhabits the subjective “I” of the poet, sometimes she is the story itself, sometimes the storyteller.

(2009: 83)

The performers of *Ceisio’i Bywyd Hi* enact a similar form of cultural translation in that they adopt multiple positions, all of which continually translate the term ‘Anne’ and what ‘she’ might represent. This is not merely to appreciate or demand the recognition of multiple positions but also to challenge the reification of such subject positions in the first place.

So, returning to Butler and how queer deconstruction might be related to politics: it becomes possible to adopt both the linguistic 'position' of a 'queer theorist' and the material 'position' of a feminist, and negotiate between them. There is no need to limit oneself to a single mode of communication – a dominant language – in order to act politically. In practice, international coalitional thinking demands that we 'accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that brings us into activism' (Butler, 2006: 48).

Cultural translation is therefore a process that potentially negotiates variable positions in a field of multiplicity. It should not operate through imposing a language developed in one cultural context upon another, for example the positions of women in the Third World should not be readily and simply considered from the perspective of First World Feminism. Such hierarchic dualisms are not desirable or productive because 'if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you," by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you' (Butler, 2006: 49).

So, in this analysis of linguistic and cultural acts of translation, it seems that live performance as embodied practice offers an environment where contingent essentialism might be usefully explored *via* a variety of 'subjective' perspectives. If, when spoken translation communicates it fails language successfully, then what is recognised as 'human' and the frame of cultural intelligibility through which that

recognition takes place, might be extended through that failure. In this 'moment' of failure then, what might emerge is a sense of a feeling body and/or bodies beyond/beside language that is/are shared between performers and spectators: the 'face' might emerge individually and collectively. Such moments of paradox might allow us to reconsider the way hierarchies of subjectivity operate through the categories of gender, sex and the human: to move subject/others beyond the limits of language and representation and concede, even celebrate, a shared yet paradoxically unrepresentable materiality.

In *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi*, translating between these multiple positions was a process that occurred between the actors on stage. Again, I witnessed its event live before 'reading' the text afterwards, similarly to how I engaged with Lazlo's performance in Chapter 1. What I am interested in next is how this investigation might inform my understanding of what I experienced in *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*. What was it that produced the radical intimacy of that performance? What was it that produced its *punctum*? How did the conditions of performance deconstruct its representations as well as interrupt the excesses of my desire? How was I encouraged not only to 'read', but also to experience 'acts of translation': how were 'we' as an audience implicated in a shifting field of multiplicity? And finally, how did the contradictory dualisms of that multiplicity cohere to produce queer moments that were political, transformative and profound?

ⁱ Crimp, apart from being a playwright, is also known for his translations of classic European texts. He usually translates from the French, with examples including Molière's *The Misanthrope* (Young Vic, 1996), Genet's *The Maids* (Young Vic, 1999) and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (Royal Court, 2007). In 2006 however, he translated Chekhov's *The Seagull* for the National Theatre. From this it is evident that he would be familiar with what it is to be positioned between two languages and the processes of political negotiation that it entails.

Chapter 6

Such Stuff As We Are Made Of

Introduction

This thesis has been concerned with developing the key ideas and challenges to be considered when exploring queer theory in relation to the contradictions and dualisms produced by the multiplicity of live performance. These have been separated into issues in the processes of production, reception, political impact, spectator transformation and translation. What connects to and interferes with these processes are the contradictions of bodily autonomy: bodies are the 'space' where language and materiality converge through chiasmus. The feeling body is violated through language and yet exists beside/beyond this violation; however this beside/beyond can only be referred to through language. So how might subjectivities be ethically negotiated in relation to the potential violations of language and the other? This is the primary question that has haunted the exploration of queer moments in this thesis so far.

Performance might stimulate us to reconsider the basic categories of epistemology and ontology regarding gender, sex and even the human itself. To reconsider the category of the human subject is to produce a challenge from the limits of representation itself: to produce an idea of a human we do not know it needs to speak at the limits of 'knowledge', what we think we know. That is why the human is more likely to be reconfigured when language and representation fail. Performance has the potential to temporarily produce a queer subject in-between the violations of

language and an unrepresentable materiality. I have characterized this moment of emergence as the ghost of the queer subject. Although it is impossible entirely to engineer queer moments in advance, they are more likely to emerge as a result of certain conditions of performance: performances which encourage radical intimacy, those that deconstruct their representations as well as interrupt the excesses of desire, and those that encourage doubly reflexive 'acts of translation'. If the dualisms of language/representation, chiasmic materiality and the performer/spectator relationship provide a challenge for queerness in 'live' performance, then queer moments emerge *in-between* such constructs. The ghost of the queer subject might thus connect and transform this latter relationship in a profound way. As an event that has the potential to *touch* the spectator, it may even produce goose bumps.

Similarly, because live performance is contingent on bodies in space, an exploration of the conditions that might produce such moments must take into account not only how performance negotiates the violations of language and representation, but also how it negotiates the excesses of desire. Queer moments emerge in-between these limitations and excesses. That is why performances cannot merely be 'read' as text, but also why they demand a process of visceral reading as the viscera respond involuntarily through the feeling body. Given this, how are control and vulnerability negotiated between subject/other? How does performance mediate and disturb its representations *and* circuits of desire to encourage bodies to see feelingly? These processes may affect the queer potential of radical intimacy through what I have called, after Butler, a 'bodily confession': the delicate balance of confessing one's vulnerability whilst maintaining a sense of one's autonomy. The moving climax/peak

of radical intimacy can produce a 'prick', as Amelia Jones calls it in relation to Franko B, that potentially transforms the subject in light of the other's affect: they are not necessarily 'orgasmic' moments as this terminology might indicate, but the body has encountered a process of changeⁱ (*aside*).

To relate performance to a political dimension is another important part to this thesis, which seeks to reconcile what has often been regarded as linguistic abstraction (Jeffreys, 1994; Edwards, 1998; Nussbaum, 1999) with a materially inflected ethics through the experience of performance. Through disturbing frames of representation and desire performance might offer ways of reconsidering how subjectivities are linguistically constituted and how such subjectivities might produce exclusions through processes of normalisation. The ethical necessity of such disturbance might also be revealed in performances that communicate a shared and common human vulnerability, despite how we are primarily defined in relation to each other and through language.

This thesis has recognised how a deconstructive approach to performance might produce circumlocution: language and representation are always already caught in endless cycles of reiteration. These processes therefore demand a continual movement of translation (as defined and discussed in Chapter 5) between variable 'linguistic' and 'material' subject positions that are always already bodily-contingent. Because of its multiplicity – its dualisms and contradictions – performance offers a fruitful domain for rehearsing how such a political process might work through seeing feelingly.

How, therefore, might performance allow its performers and spectators to translate between multiple subject positions? In Chapter 4 I suggested that it was through reflexively traversing between a multiplicity of subject positions that performance could offer its participants 'the space to reflect upon the limitations of creative and political agency' (Freshwater, 2009: 76) as well as inviting us to 'perversely enjoy our ethical discomfort and think politically about the sources of such enjoyment' (Ridout, 2006: 31). This is why the dualisms of performance can never be resolved, but engaging with them reveals how the 'performer and spectator are deeply implicated as having ethical and political responsibility for the struggle over making meaning in the production of the culture of which they are part' (Harris, 1999: 176). Therefore, another way that performance might be relevant to politics is that it can explore an embodied process of cultural translation and rehearse a critically inclusive process, that not only allows us to 'reflect', 'think' and 'struggle' as these scholars argue, but also to experience embodiment beside/beyond representation and dualistic thought.

In addition, as possible effects of this experience, queer moments produced in-between the dualisms of language/materiality and subject/other are potentially profound ethical cruxes. This is because the ghost of the queer subject might also be considered in terms of the Levinasian face. That is to say, it produces a sense of a common human vulnerability that is not immediately translatable into a linguistic prescription that one may (or must) adhere to; but rather suggests, despite this incommensurability regarding 'materiality' and language, a shared embodied predicament. In short, it reveals our involvement in a mutual materiality (a feeling

body) that cannot be reduced to language and representation. Though this does not necessitate an ethical encounter, it is however a precondition for ethics, as it demands that humans interrogate their vulnerability in relation to the other, and that of the other in relation to their own.

Queer moments are therefore potentially political because they might allow us to comprehend the full complexity of the Levinasian face, through provisionally suspending the chiastic tension between language and embodiment. This chapter provides a more detailed encounter with the nature of queer moments, transformation and their political impact in light of these complexities by specifically asking what is produced in performance and how might that survive beyond its moment. How might queer moments enable, empower and transform the subject in the light of the other and what might last beyond the moment of this encounter?

Such Stuff As We Are Made Of

This chapter explores a performance of *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* by Lia Rodriguez's Brazilian dance company, which I experienced at St Stephen's Church, Edinburgh as part of the International Fringe Festival in August 2002.

When I attended the performance, I knew nothing of the piece except that it had come highly recommended to a friend of mine and was 'Brazilian Dance'.

Furthermore, as it was attended a few months prior to my registration as a doctoral candidate, perhaps it is fair to say that I was less likely to be 'looking' at it in similar ways to the performances analysed in earlier chapters. This is important because I want to make the case that its radical intimacy was produced as a condition of the

performance environment itself. From this a case could be made that queer moments can emerge in performance environments beyond those where spectators might already expect the type of intersubjective interrogation associated with queer theory. Some of these environments might be considered as venues for 'queer' performance (Lazlo), live-art (Franko B) or postmodern playwriting (*Attempts on her Life*), which stage experimental explorations of subjectivity.

The performance of *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* (hereafter *Such Stuff As...*) consisted of three parts. I will summarise it briefly here, but its details will be presented through analysis and performatively throughout this chapter. In the first part, its seven performers worked as individuals, duets and trios. Completely naked and without any musical accompaniment they ordered the audience to sit in a variety of positions around the room whilst they produced a series of physical shapes and contortions. This part climaxed when they all stood in a variety of poses in linear formation. We were silently invited through gesture and pose to gaze at their bodies before they collapsed, convulsing in a writhing mass on the floor. They flung and wriggled their naked bodies through the spatially dispersed audience, before collectively amassing as a heap on the floor.

In the second part, after a lengthy pause, which many spectators seemed to assume was the end of the show as they started to move towards the exit, the performers got dressed. A female performer moved through the audience, slowly enunciating slogans associated with global consumerism and international terrorism, for example: 'Always Coca Cola', 'have a break have a kit kat', 'September 11' and 'Iraq'.

Finally, a male performer squared off a rectangular space with masking tape and we were ordered to sit around it. Music was finally introduced as a drum rhythmically pulsed a vibrant beat. Responding to its almost 'primal' accompaniment the performers began to march militantly within the rectangle. Again words and slogans were chanted: Kosovo! Auschwitz! Hamas! Benetton! Keep the Pound! Then, a list of basic human rights was read out and a female performer repeatedly sang the final chorus of 'Let the Sunshine In' from the musical *Hair*. It was a rousing finish after which I could not stop talking, to anyone who would listen, about the show. This chapter, and indeed this thesis, is an attempt to translate my experience of the performance into a performative language in order to indicate how it offered a series of embodied and transformative queer moments that moved me in a profound way.

The chapter deals with the three parts in sequence. The first attempts a 'visceral reading' in order to explore how the performance illuminated the limitations of language and representation and interrupted the excesses of my desires. The second section asks more specifically how its conditions negotiated the dualisms of language/materiality and subject/other to produce ghosts of queer subjects. How did the Levinasian 'face' emerge and what were its political implications? In answering this question I hope to demonstrate how its queer moments left profound traces through a form of *visceral imaging*; how these embodied queer traces survive the performance through the power of performative paradoxes. The third section analyses how the performance itself embodied a further ethical imperative to translate such moments, as it concluded with an alternative and problematic

political vision, which reinstated hierarchy and subjugation. I shall argue and attempt to demonstrate that, despite presenting a contradictory spectrum of human politics, *Such Stuff as ... caused me to experience* 'queer moments' that registered most profoundly for me during and *after* the event, and which therefore demanded the critical attention expected of a thesis.

Desire and Performance: translation and writing

Attempting a visceral reading to communicate the experience of seeing feelingly is of course problematic: how might it be possible to 'translate' and write elusive desire and transient performance? In addition, how does subjective experience become relevant beyond the liveness of performance? This difficulty might account for why theatre analysis seems seldom to explicitly mention desire as an influencing factor. However, it is pivotal to the ecology of theatre because, by placing bodies in space, performance galvanizes variable and complex circuits of desire: inter-relational highways between performance and spectators.

Scopic involvement, fantasy, imagination, visceral response, attraction, aspiration, impulse; these are all dynamic facets of spectating which inform the pleasures of performance, and how they are played out not only conditions such pleasures, but also the intersubjective ethico-political dynamic of each performance event. In short, desire is fundamental to the politics of performance, simply because of the fact that it provides a shifting dynamic of energy shared between people; therefore, the study of desire in events is inexorably linked to ethics. This is why an exploration of queer moments in performance is not merely an assessment of their efficacy in

deconstructing cultural representations; they are also 'about' how performance intercepts its own circuits of desire. Representing the complex trajectories and flows of desires within the equally complex territory of performance is a methodological challenge because both are elusive, transient and, as the previous chapters have argued, their mutual multiplicity defies representation. In fact, representing desire is to betray its productive nature. How might I write about such multiplicity without reifying desire within the dualisms of language?

Many prominent theorists have addressed this challenge – Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Freud, Lacan and so on – a number of whom have already been discussed in this thesis. Nearly all engage with desire from a psychoanalytical perspective, with Freud and Lacan usually providing a point of departure for their engagement and critique. What therefore are the representational strategies employed by these technicians of desire and how do they reproduce or tackle its sedimentation through the limits of language? Obviously, it is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed account of such tactics, however, this brief survey will choose the most relevant examples (and problems they pose) for the queer moment from my perspective.

Freud's attempt is often criticised. The primary criticism is that his approach is too schematically realised: it attempted to order libidinal disorder and to 'build a theoretical system that imposed categorical divisions where there were infinite libidinal amalgamations' (Bristow, 2002: 140). This is most clearly evident in his formulation of the Oedipus complex, a construct that reifies desire both along

gendered divisions and within a metaphoric framework. It was initially derived as a 'universal condition' to explain how a boy perceives his mother as a sexual object and his father as a rival, but became more complicated when he attempted to integrate this theory with his studies 'On the Sexual Theories of Children' (Freud, 1991: 376 – 389). As David Macey argues: 'These theories are attempts to explain the phenomenon of sexual difference, and assume the existence of a primal state in which only maleness exists; the fact that a girl does not have male genitals is therefore the result of her castration, castration being an equivalent to the blinding of Oedipus' (Macey, 2001: 281). In proposing the Oedipus complex as the foundation of sexual difference, Freud established a 'normative' version of cross-sexed desire; desire was thus reified along a dualistic gendered axis and, therefore, any deviation could be seen as a perversion of that 'norm'.

Lacan has been similarly accused of reifying desire along a structured axis of gendered positions. For Lacan, the 'symbolic' is the realm of Law that regulates desire in the Oedipus complex. That is to say, as David Macey summarises in Lacanian terms, 'the Oedipus complex marks the transition from a dual and potentially incestuous relationship with the mother to a triadic relationship in which the role and authority of the father or the Name-of-the-father are recognized' (Macey, 2001: 280). This version of the symbolic order claims that the prohibition against incest is established through axiomatic cross-sexed – male/female – positions, which are adopted within the family. Butler explains the way Lacan's symbolic presupposes these dualisms in *Undoing Gender*:

... there is an ideal and unconscious demand that is made upon social life which remains irreducible to socially legible cause and effects. The symbolic place of the father does not cede to the demands for a social reorganization of paternity. Instead, the symbolic is precisely what sets limits to any and all utopian efforts to reconfigure and relive kinship relations at some distance from the oedipal scene.

(Butler, 2004: 45)

Therefore, in this version of Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is an immutable Law characterised as the symbolic, which insists upon the masculine and feminine as positions that are beyond contestation. The hierarchy of sexual difference is a primary fact even before language intervenes.

Despite these problematic dualisms, Lacan does attempt to find a way to stress the limitations of representation in his writing because, as Malcolm Bowie points out, he recognises that language is the 'inescapable medium of desire, the place where Subject and Other come into being conjointly, and under pressure from each other' (Bowie, 1991: 81). Lacan responded to this problem through a language that is, in equal measure, elusive and paradoxical. His writing 'seeks to tease and seduce. It is full of feints, subterfuges, evasions and mimicries. It unveils and re-veils its meanings from paragraph to paragraph' (Bowie, 1991: 200).

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is an attempt to liberate desire from the schematic limitations of Freudian representation in order to celebrate its productive potentials as a radical and revolutionary force:

The great discovery of psychoanalysis was that of the production of desire, of the productions of the unconscious. But once Oedipus entered the picture, the discovery was soon buried beneath a new brand of idealism: a classical theater was substituted for the unconscious as a factory; representation was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself – in myth, tragedy, dreams – was substituted for the productive unconscious.

(2004: 25)

For Deleuze and Guattari the universe of matter is connected through a series of 'desiring machines' always coupled to one another and through which flows of energy are produced and interrupted. The flows of these connections are frustrated by the illusions created by language and representation and desiring machines appear as molar manifestations; that is to say, as a single subject or object. However, desiring machines actually are 'the nonhuman sex, the molecular machinic elements, their arrangements and their syntheses' (2004: 325). That is to say, Deleuze and Guattari make a distinction between the *molar* and *molecular* strategies of representation. Molar manifestations essentialise 'desiring-machines' as distinct ontological categories through the dualisms of language and representation. Desiring

machines, however, are *molecular*; that is to say the epistemologies of gender, sex and desire far exceed that which can be represented/contained through binary classification.

So, to use Deleuze and Guattari's own terms, though Freudian psychoanalysis liberated the *molecular* potential of desire, the 'writing' of that desire remained committed to *molar* strategies of representation. What is perhaps most interesting here in the context of this argument is the association they make between Freud's Oedipal theory and the idea of classical theatre. For Deleuze and Guattari, theatre, like Freud's metaphors for desire, can embody a problematic order of representation, an association often repeated in their philosophical tract (2004: 62, 336, 338), which would suggest that any attempts to liberate desire from representation within a theatrical framework might be problematic, maybe impossible.

Lyotard also explores theatre as a site where desire is always already compromised as a result of its representational apparatus:

Theatricality and representation, far from having to be taken as libidinal givens, *a fortiori* metaphysical, result from a certain labour on the labyrinthine and Moebian band, a labour which prints these particular folds and twists, the effect of which is a box closed upon itself, filtering impulses and allowing only those to appear on the stage which come from what will come to be known as the *exterior*,

satisfying the conditions of interiority. The representative chamber
is an energetic *dispositif*.

(2004: 3)

Here desire is represented first as a moebius strip: a paradoxical, twirling construct because it is both inside and outside of itself. The strip is created from the material body, opened out, all its surfaces exposed; it spins with burning intensity. The second phase Lyotard describes as a slowing and cooling down period, in which the moebian band forms 'the disjunctive bar'. The aim of this visual metaphor is to emphasise disjunction. It is a construct that has both an exterior and an interior and it is the 'energetic *dispositif*' of which society is constructed: desire is manipulated and shaped in systems that exploit and oppress its revolutionary capacity in a variety of ways. The bar that delineates between inside and outside, between this and not this, having finally come to rest, folds in upon itself to create a new space: *a theatrical volume*. This, according to Lyotard is the space of rational thought, binary logic and non-contradiction. Theatre thus again becomes linked with a binary system of representation, the very place where desire is betrayed.

This rather ambivalent passage is representative of Lyotard's performative attempts to track the sedimentation of desire within the social through fictional flights of fantasy. His imaginings take us on a journey away from a paradoxical and potentially revolutionary energy of desire, to a binary solidification of that energy which operates through exclusion. He attempts to further consolidate the obviously

obscure and transcendental trajectory of his thinking by introducing metaphors to represent and encourage his readers to visualise each stage of his process.

But this is the point of his flights of fancy because despite his disavowal of theatre and theatricality, Lyotard still provides the reader with metaphors because he 'cannot escape betraying the rapid movements of libidinal energy by inhibiting them in static concepts and solidifying representations' (Bristow, 2002: 139-140). Thus Lyotard's critique of 'theatre' must ultimately be performed through those very representations that he attempts to invalidate. So language will inevitably betray desire in the same ways as the feeling body beside/beyond representation can only be referred to through language. This returns us to the chiasmic relation of language and materiality made evident by the contradictions of bodily autonomy.

That is why I insist that queer moments can happen in 'theatre' despite its representational frame. In fact, it is precisely because theatre is primarily constituted by the limitations of language and representation in its systemic apparatus that exploring their production, reception, political implications and potential transformations might teach us something about our intersubjectivity as, say, 'global citizens'; the experience might be translated to become part of a wider cultural and political process. This is because the conflicting languages and representations of 'global culture' demand that we adopt dualistic subject positions, so politics might become a question of how to effectively negotiate these binaries. As Butler has demonstrated, it is only through contingent essentialism that an ethics based on a politics of desire can extend its critical inclusiveness. That is why the 'queer moment

as paradox' may be a useful concept because it can negotiate and perhaps mutually transform contradictory binaries and thus afford a form of fleeting representation to the unrepresentable.

Nonetheless, 'writing' these moments will inevitably betray them. However, if queer moments emerge at the limits of representation, then perhaps they might emerge, or be effectively translated, between a variety of languages or representational systems: theatre productions, psychoanalytical tracts, or even an academic thesis. Therefore performers and spectators might consider themselves ethically responsible for attempting to create conditions that could enable the production and reception of queer moments, and translate (them)selves between these various languages and registers, be that in written theory, enunciated speech, or embodied practice or all combined.

This chapter attempts such a translation. In their writings, the technicians of desire have attempted to use a variety of strategies of disruption through which queerness might emerge: paradox, repetition, metaphor, elusiveness, flights of fantasy, breakages, slippages; all acts of 'loss' which *may* carry the potential for a failure of communication that is productive. That is to say, they attempt to produce a sense of desire beside/beyond language. Producing a trace of materiality beside/beyond representation is where the potential for recognising common human vulnerability could lie.

The next section of this chapter ventures to performatively ‘embody’ the conditions of production and reception of a queer moment in performance, paying particular attention to the way representations and desire were interrupted. In the same way that Lyotard has attempted to explore desire through metaphor, it will inevitably construct an all too illusory theatre of desire; but it also hopes to dismantle that theatre’s reifying effects through adopting an assortment of creative tactics.

The first of these is to shift between a variety of writing registers. These might be considered as moving between academic, annotative, objective personal, playful, poetic, non-grammatical, and third person perspectives. The second tactic is typographically to emulate how performance might produce conditions that facilitate a moving between perspectives and between their multiplicity of implied subject positions.

What follows is presented in parallel columns; to begin with the reader might consider them to represent the ‘feeling’ and ‘reading’ dimensions of performance. As the presentation proceeds, its shifts, movements, gaps and repetitions might bring this dichotomy into question. The columns attempt to demonstrate that you need at least two perspectives to produce contradictions in order to generate paradoxes. The third tactic is to incorporate additional third-person perspectives into the presentation at crucial moments, to support or contradict ‘my’ other positions. Here again I experiment with the typography, this time incorporating the thesis footnote/endnote system to reinforce the point about the multiplicity of performance and audience reception. Whereas the footnotes offer additional

perspectives to the same performance from a variety of reviewers, the endnote invites the reader to pause the experience of performative writing. Through doing so it asks you to consider the analysis of a different performance altogether – in another time and place – which might inform your understanding of how I experienced *Such Stuff As...* Such strategies are intended to imitate the complexity of reception in all performance.

This experiment demands an alternative reading practice, but it might at least encourage an engagement with the unrepresentable and free-flowing vectors of desire through generating a variety of perspectives, rather than, say, re-producing a binary system of theory and practice. Of course, the writing cannot emulate those conditions, where in-between the performance of the text and the spectators' experience of its writing, the ghost of the queer subject emerged. Perhaps, though, it might lead the reader closer to the profundity of a moment that has been lost in translation.

Such Stuff As We Are Made Of

The man is naked as he walks into the hall from a corner of the room I did not expect and he marches up to us and says really calmly and commandingly can you move to this section of the room and so **we get up and move to the place his finger points at and.....**

Having an
experience.....

.....
.....

Such Stuff As We Are Made Of

Similar to the Brechtian verfremdungseffekt, the performance environment is immediately defamiliarised by this direct address¹, our enforced physical movement and the unexpected sight of the performer's explicit body leading us calmly to our new positions. Here, the potential docile complacency of the audience is disturbed. More so perhaps because this shifting perspective seems pointless; we could have been led to this position in the first place. Why have we been made to move? Why do we comply so readily? This is the first of many strategies that '*sets up a series of social, political and ideological interruptions that remind us that representations are not given but produced*' (Wright, 1989: 19) and an aesthetic that proceeds through interruption².....

we sit down again. He slowly positions his naked body **in front and he looks like a ball of**

¹ Indeed, we are moved around rather bossily by the cast (Websites: Dougill).

² Before each section of the piece a dancer directs us to watch from a different part of the room. Sitting or kneeling on the floor in still silence you couldn't be more aware of your own flesh and bones squishing, aching and seizing (Websites: Winship).

In an instance of beauty, the naked flesh invites the audience to *'impose their gaze on the stage happenings'* (Wright, 1989: 55-6). Wright is here referring to an experiment conducted by a director at the Berliner Ensemble where an actor was told simply to stand on stage and do nothing. When asked, the spectators of his 'performance' imposed meaning and narrative on the event. We too are invited to become voyeurs of the flesh. What happens when I impose my gaze on the stage happenings? The explicit, demystified body of the previous instant is juxtaposed with a representation of flesh that produces a

flesh with his head
down in front of his knees but his arm is like the big hand of a clock pointing towards the twelve and nothing seems to be happening but.....
...
H...i...s.....
.....h...a...n...d...
.....i.....
s.....m...
.....o.....v.....i.....
n.....g.....
.....and....this
.... I.....gradually
notice³.

³ The atmosphere is one of intense concentration, staring at the flesh in front of us, straining to see every cell (Websites: Winship)

What happens when I impose my gaze on the stage happenings? Here the performer's careful positioning of the body, foetal in aspect, spherical in connotation, assumes the

sense of
disidentification with
the previous instant.
This rupture almost
produces in effect an
erasure of the human
subject who had
previously ordered
us to move.

.....surely
resides.....
....

**But suddenly we
are asked to move**

aesthetic beauty of a
still life. As Barthes
explains whilst
looking at the
ambivalence of erotic
photography, such
an image can launch
‘desire beyond what
it permits us to see’
(2000: 59) so that I
desire you with my
eyes performer. How
could I not with such
a delightful parade of
sculpted flesh for my
scopic pleasure after
all ‘visual
impressions remain
the most frequent
pathway along which
libidinal excitation is
aroused’ (Freud,
1991: 298) upon you
I fixate cogitate and
imagine your
beautiful presence
an object of my
desire because
visibility is a trap so
how can you resist
fetishisation now?

**But suddenly we
are asked to move**

and then three women come in
through a door in the room and
they are also naked and they
position themselves and suddenly
I'm not sure where one starts and
the other begins but they look like
one shape with lots of hands and
lots of arms and lots of legs and
lots of feet and I am not sure how
many because I like watching
instead of counting.

...in not having something which...

**But suddenly we are asked to
move...**

Barthes's criticism that as humans we lack subtlety in our scientific desire for categorisation due to the 'coarseness of our organs' (1975: 61) seems relevant here. He cites an unreferenced Nietzsche to point out that we cannot acknowledge 'a tree is a new thing at every instant; we affirm the *form* because we do not seize the subtlety of an absolute moment' (Barthes, 1975: 61); or to put a Deleuzian and Guattarian twist upon it, the molar betrays the molecular in each instant. However in this moment of fantastical play the gaze is modified and the material flesh of the human subject challenges molar representation. This 'human' form does not comply with the representational limits of human subjectivity. Through reordering and reforming the material substance that creates the 'human', it challenges those representational limitations of materiality, taxonomy and sexual difference through which we think we recognise the 'human'⁴.

⁴ Miniscule movements flow in slow motion like thousands of years of evolution before our eyes, metamorphosing from amoeba to human through a strange cycle of shapes and bodies (Websites: Winship).

Barthes's criticism that as humans we lack subtlety in our scientific desire for categorisation due to the 'coarseness of our organs' (1975: 61) seems relevant here. He cites an unreferenced Nietzsche to point out that we cannot acknowledge 'a tree is a new thing at every instant; we affirm the *form* because we do not seize the subtlety of an absolute moment' (Barthes, 1975: 61); or to put a Deleuzian and Guattarian twist upon it, the molar betrays the molecular in each instant. However in this moment of fantastical play the gaze is modified and the material flesh of the human subject challenges molar representation. This 'human' form does not comply with the representational limits of human subjectivity. Through reordering and reforming the material substance that creates the 'human', it challenges those representational limitations of materiality, taxonomy and sexual difference through which we think we recognise the 'human'⁵.

⁵ After our initial acquaintance with their differing attributes it becomes curiously possible to ignore them and focus on the body, or flesh, as an idea (Websites: Dougill).

...and there are two men naked
as one but they look like the push-me pull-me animal in Dr Dolittle
with two heads sticking
out of opposite sides of what
seems to be one body or perhaps
like non-identical conjoined twins.

**...can be immediately
conceptualised** (Wright, 1989: 125).

**Suddenly we are asked to
move...** ⁱⁱ (*aside, history and
(someone else's) personal*).

Seven naked

bodies standing in

line facing

forwards.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

....Seven naked

bodies standing in

line facing

backwards.....

.....

.....

.....

Seven naked bodies

still on the

floor.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....Flap!..

Seven naked bodies

still on the

floor.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

FlapFlap! Seven

naked bodies still on

the

floor...FlapFlap.....

The positioning of

the performers'

bodies in a still line

for the scrutiny of the

spectator's

inspection may be

considered by this

moment of the

performance to be

witnessed by a

reformed gaze. The

series of

performative

interruptions that

preceded this

moment created a

catalytic process

whereby normative

sight might have

produced queer

insight. As a result,

the bodies I now

encountered were

less mediated by the

meanings culture

gives them and

produced a

momentary glimpse

of how a body might

resist fetishisation.

Here the naked

body, rather than

being subjugated

within its aesthetic

flapflap.....flap
 flapflapflapapapaappfla
 p....flap
 flap.....

flapflap.....flap

 Flapflapflapflapflapfla
 pflapthey are like fish
 flapping on the floor
 dying fish flapping
 against each other
 and moving flap flap
 flap towards us and
 we don't know what
 to do as they flap
 between us against
 us through us and
 some of us move for
 them and some of us
 don't and some of us
 laugh and some of
 us look scared as
 their
 flapflapflapflapflap
 collective heap
 by the wall

Bodies
 are words
 which speaks
 their own⁶

⁶ metaphysical, profoundly significant point and is very much mistaken in her judgment? All I can say is, go and see for yourselves (Websites: Horvat).

context, enacted a performative striptease. What this revealed was how language and discourse claims its gendered, sexed and human subjects: *'Give me your body and I will give you meaning, I will make you a name and a word in my discourse'* (de Certeau, 1984: 149). The audience is invited to perceive the body differently, as a site/moment where language/materiality are in a process of struggle. Could it be that for an instant before their collapse I had witnessed a performative moment embodying the paradox of bodily autonomy⁷

⁷ [*Such Stuff*] is too controlling too safe...Is it possible that yours truly has missed some hidden

Seeing

The last section has attempted to performatively make corporeal how *Such Stuff As...* disrupted its own visual representations and circuits of desire to produce a ghost of the queer subject. This section will investigate further what I 'saw': that is, how did the performance allow the full complexity of the Levinasian face to emerge? This complexity, I will argue, is not limited to the visual field but also crosses in-between other sensory experiences. How does seeing feelingly emerge as a series of inter-sensory, perhaps synesthetic, queer moments, each haunted by the others' excesses? The multiple perspectives of live performance depend not only on how you see it, but also how you hear it, smell it, feel it, taste it.

Writing for *The Times*, David Dougill claimed of *Such Stuff As...* that 'after our initial acquaintance with [the performers'] differing attributes it becomes curiously possible to ignore them and focus on the body, or flesh, as an idea' (Websites: Dougill). Here their human subjectivity was erased and he could concentrate on their flesh as concept; the subject became invisible in order to let the material body emerge. From my perspective this tells only half the story, as it is precisely the interplay between the linguistic/material subject and their chiasmic interdependence, which the performance makes evident. Rather than the disappearance of the subject, something else emerged in that space between its appearance/disappearance, in-between language and materiality. What was it I 'saw'?

Because of its series of interruptions, such as the consistent ordering of the audience to change positions, the performance offered crucial moments of interception in its

circuits of desire; similarly such performative disruptions produced representational juxtapositions through which the human flesh seemed to signify beyond the human. In a similar sense to how cubist portraits make the body abstract, these interventions worked within the visual field to challenge spectatorial attempts to fetishise the performing body. Instead, the bodies' 'subjectivity' emerged at the limits of the culturally intelligible.

As a result of these conditions, this tension between language and materiality was no more evident than when, mid-way through the performance, the seven performers simply presented their naked bodies in a linear formation for what Lindsey Winship describes as a 'temporary eternity' (Websites: Winship). It is in the paradox of this temporary eternity that we might locate a queer moment: an instant with profound effects. Rather than being able to ignore the human subject, it was possible to simultaneously apprehend a series of subjects as singularly constituted through and beyond language. These 'human' subjects were, in that moment of eternity, both autonomous and vulnerable, provisionally non-human in their 'materiality'. This moment therefore did not enact the disappearance of the human subject but rather emerged in-between the line of its/their appearance/disappearance. As the individual faces vanished they came into focus. The Levinasian face emerged between the non/human as a ghost of the queer subject was made flesh.

On this topic of the 'human' and its affiliation to visual representations, Butler writes:

Accordingly, our capacity to respond with outrage, opposition, and critique will depend in part on how the differential norm of the human is communicated through visual and discursive frames. There are ways of framing that will bring the human into view in its frailty and precariousness, that will allow us to stand for the value and dignity of human life, to react with outrage when lives are degraded or eviscerated without regard for their value as lives.

(2009: 77)

Visual frames of representation and language establish the norms through which subjects might be considered as human or not human, allowing an ethical response to the Levinasian 'human' face to emerge. *Such Stuff As...* potentially offered a disruption to such visual frames and destabilized the very category of the 'human', through affording the concept of the non/human to emerge.

The non/human, as explored in Chapter 1, is a destabilizing concept that articulates queer subjectivity. It does so by challenging the category of the human subject and the violating exclusions sometimes enacted in the name of the 'human' against subjectivities that are deemed inhuman. Butler argues that to re-achieve the human on another plane, the 'human' must become strange to itself (Butler, 2004: 191). In fact, this process of re-making demands a departure from the 'human'. But this does not necessitate the erasure of the human subject; without the 'foundation' of the presuppositional norms and practices that define the 'human' we would not be able

to think/feel through the category at all. The appearance of the non/human, therefore, offers an opportunity to work both through and beyond the 'human'.

In retrospect – and with these perspectives in mind – what emerged through *Such Stuff As...* was a process that visually reconfigured the human subject. The radical intimacy encouraged through the performers' bodily confessions produced a performative interrogation, which encouraged me to see feelingly through the conceptual/embodied shifting between the human and the non-human. In addition, what materialised through this process for a moment was a performative embodiment of the paradox of the non/human. On the cusp between materiality and language a visceral imaging was produced in which the human and the non-human (or, perhaps better, the 'un-human') existed simultaneously: *performing the non-human produces a human act*. Here, the seeming incommensurability of the human and non-human was fleetingly tangible. Of course, just as the 'truth' of linguistic paradoxes can only be grasped provisionally, so here the queer moment is only an instant of clarity, but an overriding truth is grasped. It is similar to striking a light in order to better see the dark. *It proceeds by interruption*: a flash of insight. With such a flash, a negative leaves its positive imprint on the mind, embodied as a visceral imaging: a trace of the profound.

For the queer moment is an embodied paradox a suggestion a provisional understanding that is grasped fleetingly and then escapes it is at the edge of thought because it is both within and without language tangible yet not so now you see it now you don't it is mist or like mist a little mystical perhaps because you see it clearly

go towards it and then it is no longer there though it surrounds you dancing on the periphery you can not help but replace yourself at the centre just as dualistic thought pushes its way back into desire my desire to see things clearly feelingly.. contradiction...paradox.....has it gone?

Such stuff as we are made of?

Such stuff as dreams are made ofⁱⁱⁱ (aside) ...

Hearing

A moment later their bodies collapsed, convulsed and gathered together into an image, which for me in that instant was reminiscent of mass genocide. After this climactic and viscerally evocative event, which many mistook as the end of the performance, the performers calmly stood up and got dressed. Our departure was halted by yet another interruption: a female performer, now fully clothed, was moving erratically through the audience. As she moved she gently brushed past us, initiating human contact in a way which had mostly been avoided by many of the spectators a moment before as they stepped out of the way of convulsing bodies.

Having shifted our visual perspectives to focus on materiality, language and vocalised sound/speech was introduced for the first time. As she moved, she chanted:

Iraq

September 11

Always Coca Cola

Make Love not

it do Just

war

Saab

Have a break

have a kit kat.

What is significant here is that, as the performance's visual representations and language produced a sense impression of how human subjects are can be violated, it nonetheless continued to encourage the possibility of seeing feelingly; though not merely on the level of sight, but across the senses. It was suddenly very apparent that the performance prior to this moment had been conducted mostly in silence – devoid of language or musical accompaniment. This had meant that our focus had up until this point been mostly visual and visceral, but now our aural faculties were being explored. Through separating the way it focused on the senses, *Such Stuff As...* was able to emphasise the cross-sensory experiences we might take for granted⁸.

These terms enunciated by the female performer were rendered peculiar not only by their sudden emergence in the aesthetics of performance but also through their pronunciation. The performer took her time to announce each delicious phoneme; her breath, tongue and lips salivated over each succulent syllable, extensively exploring the materiality of language. With such poetic rendering, these terms became almost comic, a queer articulation of those ridiculous everyday slogans that punctuate contemporary life.

⁸ This leads me to think that the 'separation of the senses' is a visceral norm perhaps equivalent to representation, as it divides us through ourselves.

For what were these slogans but various condensed representations of violence that have become normalized through the repeated invocation of these condensed linguistic forms? As I explored in relation to *Attempts on her Life*, these words or phrases reflect the universalising narrative of global consumerism and terrorism, a language that can encourage an invading uniformity, which can eradicate difference for commercial gain or to justify warfare. As the words materialised in her mouth, it also materialised that there was something *chillingly* normative about these cultural references. Through the sense of auditory surprise, just as I had ‘seen’ the human anew, now I could ‘hear’ words very differently. How do the things we hear violate and exclude human subjects? How might we negotiate and challenge these exclusions?

As the non/human had emerged in a visual paradox it seemed now to be speaking to us and demanding that we hear differently. If in order to produce an idea of a human we do not know, if it needs to speak at the limits of what we think we know, here, quite literally, the non/human seemed to be speaking at the central limits of culture in order to illuminate culture’s violations. Speaking of what we knew, but with a trace of queer subjectivity, this female performer overtly insinuated the way we produce and receive language between subject/other.

Feeling

As the performers’ bodies collapsed and convulsed erratically into the audience, the general instinct seemed to be to step out of the way. One lady – a ‘corpse’ wrapped

around her feet – let out an uncontrollable laugh, nervous and awkward: the desire to move away, even when physically engaged, was evident. Similarly, I found the writhing, sweating bodies that wrapped themselves around me repellent. In contrast, as the female performer moved between us, I consented to her touch. What might this radical disjuncture in these responses to flesh tell us?

In *Powers of Horror* (1982) Julie Kristeva tells us that whatever is 'abject' 'is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses' (Kristeva, 1982: 2). Like paradox, the abject places the dualisms upon which our truth systems are seemingly validated into crisis. She goes on to say:

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardy and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive from that border.

(1982: 3)

Fascinatingly, again the spectre of theatre appears, but this is not the rational theatre of Lyotard, or Deleuze and Guattari. This 'true theatre' is perhaps closer to

Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' in that it exists at the limits of representation. Perhaps then, to collapse the binary between self and abjection is to encounter the mortality of flesh and the paradoxical 'truth' of the non/human. This recognition of the 'materiality' of my existence reminded me of the inescapable fact that as flesh, 'I' must ultimately perish.

As bodies flung themselves against us – their sweat, their flesh – my death was tangible in their every breath. In encountering the abject flesh, which had a moment ago been both less and more than human, the trace of the non/human was still present/absent. Unlike Kristeva's 'true theatre', they were still only representations of corpses; however, a trace of the non/human, at the limits of representation, haunted their moving bodies. It was a moment where, as explored by Kristeva, 'the death that "I" am provokes horror, there is a choking sensation that does not separate inside from outside but draws them the one into the other, indefinitely' (Kristeva, 1982: 25).

In contrast, perhaps because she was 'humanised' by clothes and language, I was drawn to the touch of the female performer. What makes flesh abject? What makes flesh 'human'? It seems that in-between my varying response to touch, between material and linguistic representations of the body, that the ghost of the non/human was still being felt. What seems crucial here, is that as an audience 'we' were integrated in our connected immersion by these representations of abject and 'human' flesh: linked by touch. Through encountering abjection, 'I' impossibly *felt* a common humanity^{iv} (*aside*).

Utopian Instances

The final part of *Such Stuff As...*, in contrast to its previous sequences, introduced a sense of order and political revolution. With the squaring off of a rectangular performance space, the audience was ordered to sit around it as the performers robotically chanted political slogans accompanied by controlled rhythmical movement, the excessive drill suggested a sense of paradoxical oppressive resistance and militant revolution. As Lindsey Winship recognises in her review of the show, 'their voices are asking for peace but their bodies say power'. This form of generalised politics was merely the utterance of clichés through which 'they convince us to feel what they feel, to join their ranks, by pure force of will. It isn't our decision, you could say. We were just acting on orders' (Websites: Winship).

It is often easy to obey, comply, to be subjugated. It is often easy to relinquish control. It is also often easy to exclude and violate, wittingly or unwittingly. Foucault in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* suggests that the reason, above all else, that the book is an investigation into ethics is because ultimately it examines how we might free our desires from fascism: 'How does one keep from being fascist (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant?' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: xv). Ethics therefore is a constant act of negotiation between representations and desire, which must always interrogate what violations are being produced. What is being excluded in the name of politics? What has to be provisionally excluded in the process of creating non-violent futures?

To experience the performers' queer subjectivity I had to comply with my own subjugation. The performance's disruption of representations and interceptions of desire were produced through acts of overtly instigated coercion. But this is precisely the point, the body is 'where we encounter a range of perspectives that may or may not be our own' (Butler, 2009: 53); it is where 'we are at once acted upon and acting' (Butler, 2006: 16).

It seems that *Such Stuff As...* embodied a broad spectrum of challenges, possibilities and potential consequences to do with the politics of human subjectivity: this last is by necessity a contradictory and hierarchical process, which live performance can emphasise. Representations, languages and desires violate and exclude; they can produce genocide, calls to war and acts of terrorism. There are, however, possible ways to negotiate violations and exclusions, contradictions and dualisms in an ongoing process of translation. Queer moments are utopian instances within the continual cultural struggle over subjectivity. This is how queer moments become where queer theory, politics and transforming performance potentially meet. They are moments when dualistic conceptions of the ontological categories of gender, sex or the human can be transformed between subject/other: they enable, empower and transform the 'subject' in the light of the 'other'. This experience might also carry with it transformative potentials.

If queer moments are instances of embodied paradoxes where the dualisms of subject/other momentarily cohere through a sense of a one's feeling body beside/beyond representation, the 'truths' that are produced in excess of these

binaries might also be embodied. This chapter has explored how queer moments can produce a form of visceral imaging, the experience of which leaves its trace after the event. Such instances are potentially profound: they are moments that leave a lasting impression and are why, however ephemeral, through ephemerality queer performance can survive.

As Geraldine Harris has argued, the political effect of performance therefore lies not in its intention, but in the specific dynamic between multiple elements at any given time (1999: 172). It will never emerge in the same way twice, and non/humans will not experience it in the same way once. This means that queer moments can potentially exist in any performance environment, not merely those self-nominated as 'queer', depending on the conditions that course through any given moment. Performance offers us a place to produce^v (*aside*), receive, politically negotiate and transform subjectivity in an ethically inclusive encounter within a domain of potential collective responsibility.

The Desire to Speak: translating queer moments

After the event I found myself speaking excitedly with strangers about what I had just witnessed and wanting to translate the experience somehow. What was this desire to speak, after the event; what was it that propelled this 'desiring-machine' to connect? It may well be a flight of fancy, but for a moment I would like to re-imagine seven naked bodies standing in line for inspection, to re-imagine a word rendered strange, to re-imagine a touch rendered abject. For a moment, seven human forms

were unformed as non-humans, language was material, the word was made flesh, as the non-human performed a human act.

For me, these fleeting excesses of truth produced by paradoxical moments and their visceral imaging produced a profundity that inspires one to search for the words to speak of and translate its untranslatable sources. This queer encounter between 'self' and 'other', this shared experience is difficult to articulate but, nevertheless, is felt in my bones. Representation and desire can be negotiated productively through paradox, and what this paradox produced was a flow that connected with my desire to speak to others, then and now, of the stuff that we are made of.

Butler has argued that 'if the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense' (2006: 151). The 'human' might emerge therefore between theory and practice, text and performance, language and materiality, not to mention across disciplines and multiple performance environments. Queer moments in performance are how we might produce, receive, negotiate and transform subjectivity. Translating such profound experiences through finding other ways we might produce, receive and interrogate the 'human', is how queer moments and subjectivities might continue to transform and survive.

ⁱ As mentioned in the introduction, there are parallels here between queer moments, Jones' 'prick' and Barthes' concept of 'jouissance', which he discusses in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). For Barthes, 'jouissance' refers to the potentially disruptive experience that a reader might encounter whilst reading avant-garde texts. Whilst 'pleasure' can be expressed through words, 'jouissance' cannot (1973: 21). The text which produces jouissance, or 'bliss' as translated in the English version of the book, 'imposes a state of loss ... discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relations with language' (1973: 14). Jouissance, like queer moments, are a way of experiencing the feeling body (beside/beyond representation) and the unmediated Real.

ⁱⁱ Eight years after I wrote the first draft of this performative experiment, I discovered the following analysis of a performance by Maria Donata D'Urso by Nick Ridout:

In *Pezzo 0 (due)* (Centro de Arte Moderna, Lisbon, 2002), Maria Donata D'Urso is visible, naked, in low light, surrounded by an insect-like scratch and crackle of electronic sound. As she moves her limbs slowly in the subdued and tightly focused pool of light, it soon becomes impossible to make out the relationships between surfaces and volumes. The light reveals to the spectator an area of human skin, beneath which lies flesh, but what precisely lies below this particular surface cannot be determined. Is this a section of her thigh or part of her back? The work is a moving sequence of sculptural forms, all produced by a single human body, and each successive form seems to recall, half-abstractly, the human figure of classical representation, but without settling into a configuration in which a full human figure becomes visible in its symmetry and organisation. The work, which lasts about half an hour, seems to combine aspects of the beauty of classical statuary with some of the fascination of the contortionist. The unmistakable intention that lies behind each successive movement of the body assures the spectator that there is a single and coherent human subject carrying out these actions, even as it remains impossible to identify a single human subject from the elements of human flesh and skin which are made visible in the performance. This effect of an apparent separation of the evidence of a human mind (intention) and the actions and organisation of a human body is **profoundly** unsettling as well as very beautiful ... There is nothing to be ethical about here. Yet in the sheer strangeness with which it presents that most familiar of forms – the human body – it issues what one might call, in language to echo Levinas', a challenge from the place of the other. The other, in this case, is simultaneously the artist who made the work and who performs it here, readily identifiable with the name Maria Donata D'Urso, and also the disorganised body the spectator encounters, which appears, in a quietly shocking way, to be something other than a single comprehensible human body that might be attached to the name Maria Donata D'Urso. The challenge issued by this work, from the place of the other, is to our conception of what it is to be or have a human body, and to have intentions that make it do things. The human figure, so often the luminous centre of the aesthetic experience and the presence with which the spectator may easily identify, is here shadowed and obscured in such a way as to render it utterly strange to all those human figures who sit in the dark and watch it. Without making any overt ethical claims, this piece seems to challenge the

human spectator to consider what it is that allows him or her to recognise another as a fellow human.

(2009: 67-9, emphasis added)

I repeat it at length here because the aesthetics and conditions of Maria Donata D'urso's, performance as well as Ridout's analysis, echoes both the aesthetics of *Such Stuff* and my interpretation of that event. Ridout's engagement with the profundity of the experience through his focus on the strangeness of the human form and its relation to ethics and the Levinasian face directly echoes my arguments throughout the thesis. Here, in another time and place, is an example of radical intimacy and the non/human.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am aware that such a description might invite charges of secular theologising. As I have argued in the Introduction, I hope that the theoretical framework I have provided throughout this thesis, in an attempt to describe queer moments, might counter such accusations.

^{iv} This discussion of abjection offers another useful perspective on Amelia Jones' punctum experience in witnessing Franko B's bleeding body in Chapter 2. Through offering his blood, Franko B. produces a sense of the non/human: his wounded flesh evokes a sense of mortality through abjection. It is through this abjection that Jones experienced the 'prick' of their common humanity.

^v Of course, there is arguably always an element of 'intention' in the desire to create performance, however, such intentions cannot necessitate the political impact/affect of that performance.

Conclusion

After Words

In August 2009, I returned to the Edinburgh festival, both as a performer and as a spectator. I appeared at the Pleasance Theatre, in a show I had co-written with my long-time collaborator Ben Lewis called *My Name is Sue*, in which I played the eponymous anti-heroine. Dressed in my mother's skirt, a cardigan from Marks and Spencers, brown tights and a pair of flat, sensible shoes, I performed a cycle of eight songs accompanied by myself on the piano, but also by a trio of women on violin, cello, and drums: they were also dressed as 'Sue.' The show explored the apparently mundane details of Sue's life from her favourite film – *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991), starring Julia Roberts – to her favourite pastime: riding the Cardiff buses. Gradually, during the course of the whole performance, it emerged that Sue was a prophet and had a message for her audience: the apocalypse was imminent. The show concluded with a rousing and incongruously jaunty chorus of chanting – 'We're all going to die!' – during which the audience generally seemed to participate enthusiastically. As I was simultaneously entering the final stages of completing this doctorate, this was possibly my first experiment with 'queer performance' in practice.

With cyclical symmetry it was during this time that I also experienced another performance that moved and transformed me in a profound way. The power of this transformative experience shared similar qualities with *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*, though of course they were also inevitably different. Kristin Fredricksson's

Everything Must Go (or The Voluntary Attempt to Overcome Unnecessary Obstacles)

was a one-woman performance piece staged at St. Augustine's church, throughout that August. The show was a tribute to her father who had died from pancreatic cancer only two months previously. She had originally performed it with him the previous year in order to tell the story of his fascinating life. After his death, she adapted the show so that it could be performed without him.

Using a combination of non-sequential film-footage, dance, physical theatre, excerpts from his note books and puppetry, she gradually conjured a vivid picture of an eccentric Welshman, born in 1930, who professed a love for track-and-field hurdle races by day but enjoyed performing in drag by night. This was a man who, much to the disgust of his headmaster, would teach dance as well as athletics to the boys in his PE classes. We learned of his elaborate money-saving schemes: how he would save money on bills by bottling water from the taps in the local library. He was a hoarder who kept everything higgledy-piggledy in his house. Thus in the first scene Fredricksson welcomed us as an estate agent, donning a blonde wig and creating an imaginary path on-stage to describe its interior. The ramshackle environment which she outlined was reflected on stage, with a variety of half-size cardboard cut-outs presenting her father at various ages and as different characters: one adorned with lip-stick and a head-scarf, another with trilby and fake-moustache, and so on. It seemed that her father was quite a performer, so the stage became a fitting environment for this tribute. She quoted philosopher Bernard Suits's definition of play as 'the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (2005: 55): her father was a man who lived his life as a sort of game.

Always addressing the audience directly, Kristin played several parts, as well as speaking as herself. These included the various characters invented by her father, as she dressed up to replicate the images of the cardboard cut-outs. In the final moments of the show Fredricksson danced with a half-size puppet of her father, whilst on an up-stage cine-screen an exact image of the onstage set emerged, except that in this version her father was present and Kristin was assisting him in donning a skirt, wig and applying make-up. Whilst for us she danced with the puppet, this footage demonstrated how the play had ended when her father was still alive and they could dance together for another audience. In that moment I experienced an overwhelming sense of grief, as though I was mourning a personal friend. What might these two experiences, as performer of Sue and spectator of Kristin at the Edinburgh festival, reveal to one about queer moments in performance?

Throughout this thesis I have investigated how we might approach moments of performance as 'embodied knowledge' and how such an investigation might expose that the deconstructive approach of queer theory cannot fully serve as a methodological paradigm. Though useful in analysing how the body primarily means through language and in relation to the other, such theory fails to account for how a 'materiality' might exceed the limits of language and representation, to directly impact 'in the moment' of live performance. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris argue that, in *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick demonstrates an awareness of the limits of deconstruction when theorising the body. Sedgwick would rather consider the body from:

... a non-dualistic paradigm based on the notion of 'beside' – in which 'a number of elements may lie alongside one another though not an infinity of them' (Sedgwick, 2003: 8). This then is an attempt at a model of thinking that acknowledges difference without either denying the possibility of community and connection or resorting to relativism.

(Aston and Harris, 2008: 10)

Queer moments, I have argued, emerge when the contradictory dualisms of performance are negotiated in such a way that they produce a glimpse of a non-dualistic moment of paradox, which neither denies the dualisms that produce it nor indicates a privileging of either of its parts. So, for example, Lazlo Pearlman through exploring the paradoxes of his gendered identity to produce an instant where *performing masculinity becomes a feminine act*. Jill Dolan argues, 'to even glimpse a utopia, I think we have to learn to live with a certain number of contradictions' (Dolan, 2005: 12). Perhaps what I witnessed here through this performative paradox is a way to live with such contradictions and the utopian dimensions of queer moments.

What has been most difficult about this project was to find a way of investigating how such paradoxes might touch and transform spectators in performance. In Amelia Jones's account of Franko B's performances I discovered a similar attempt to describe such moments, which seem to exist beside/beyond language and representation.

Jones's writing prompted my making a connection between the vulnerability that the artist 'confessed' to the audience through his naked body – a delicate negotiation between his self-regulated bleeding and his sharing of those porous boundaries with the audience – and an environment imbued with radical intimacy. Such an environment, I argued, has the potential to fundamentally destabilize the dualisms of subject/other, the negotiation of which might produce a relational paradox: for example, the performer and spectator may share a sense of *a body that confesses its own silence* (or perhaps, a body resounds with silent confession). Thus I proposed that when performance reveals a feeling body, beside/beyond language and representation it might not only be 'read', but also viscerally felt. Through revealing the contradictions of bodily autonomy (the body that is, and is not, mine), such contradictions may produce a sense of corporeal transformation in the spectator, which can resonate deeply: becoming profound through visceral imaging.

Dolan has written:

When a course meeting 'clicks', students and teachers are linked together in a moment as profound and fleeting as performance. Teaching is like performance, and classrooms are like theatre; our encounters there are ephemeral, unreproducible... Classrooms are places of longing and loss, in which embodied emotions roil to prompt the pursuit of intellectual fulfilment, a state that can only be attained for a moment. This is the stuff of desire.

(2001: 147)

In effect it is such, or similar, moments that ‘click’ between performers and spectators that I have been investigating in performance. If this ‘is the stuff of desire,’ analysing the conditions of performance that are more likely to produce queer moments must take into account not only how it negotiates its language and representations, but also its circuits of desire. That is why an investigation into queer moments has to combine the methodology of deconstruction with the phenomenological approaches and visceral readings that (as set out in Chapters 3) I attempted in my analysis of *XXX* and *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*. This is because, in performance discourse (language/representation) is forever becoming visceral, and vice versa.

Investigating queer moments also reveals how performance might usefully explore what forms a queer-inflected embodied politics might take. The critique of dualisms and representational exclusions cannot operate fully beside/beyond those binaries; however it is in their constant negotiation that utopia – understood as an ongoing process – might be glimpsed and consolidated. In life and in performance, contradictions, dualisms and misunderstandings are inevitable. The question is: how can we make this inevitability productive? Peggy Phelan writes:

It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self- and other – and not the attempt to arrive at one side or another – that we discover real hope. That walk is our always

suspended performance – in the classroom, in the political field, in relation to one another and to ourselves.

(Phelan, 1993: 88-89; emphasis in original)

Such contingent essentialism – the ability to translate between different provisional subject positions – is demonstrated in Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* (2007). In addition, investigating it as a Welsh-language performance – *Ceisio'i Bywyd Hi* (2009) – allowed me to explore cultural translation as a process that mediates these dualisms of subject/other. As Butler argues, 'oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform' (2006: 151). Furthermore, analysing such acts of translation in performance, between performers and spectators, might produce a sense of that shared body that exists beside/beyond language because (as set out in Chapters 4 and 5) *when translation communicates, it fails language successfully*.

It is precisely these acts of translation that *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of* produced so successfully. As a spectator one was offered a variety of perspectives on the 'human' subject. Traversing between these perspectives both intercepted my desires and rendered the dualisms of language and representation strange. In a series of brief moments I saw, heard and touched *the ghost of a queer subject*: where human/non-human existed simultaneously and where the body beside/beyond language emerged through representation. In these moments, I was moved and touched profoundly: the queer spectre experienced was akin, I thought and felt, to someone walking over my grave.

The writing of this thesis may be taken as an example of the durational and transformative affects that queer moments can have. The irony of course is that it takes a thesis to translate these fleeting moments into other formulations and forms, and even then the whole thesis will still fall short of the experience. It has inevitably *transformed*. However, as Phelan argues:

It does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation. The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself. The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself.

(1993: 148)

This act of writing is a part of the legacy left by the queer moments I experienced in *Such Stuff As We Are Made Of*.

This is not the only legacy. Having adopted the position of spectator for the duration of the research for this thesis, it could of course be interesting to investigate queer moments in performance from the position of practitioner. How might I put these conclusions into practice? *My Name is Sue* was possibly my first step in this direction, though I did not realise it at the time, as the process of its development did not

reflexively engage with these issues and discoveries. However, through its exploration of gender performativity and common human vulnerability – ‘We’re All Going to Die’ – perhaps the embodied traces of the queer moments in this thesis were continuing to have an effect and being translated into practice.

For example, as previously noted in the Introduction on the subject of common human vulnerability, Dolan argues that sharing the liveness of performance ‘promotes a necessary and moving confrontation with mortality...by reminding us that however differently we live, our common, flesh-full cause is that in performance, we’re dying together’ (2005: 41).

In her conclusion to *Unmarked* (1993), Phelan considers the relationship between the Real and the representational, as well as transformative possibilities offered by this relation:

The transformative possibilities of the Real, we may have to trust, while unable to be fully confirmed within the field of the visible (or the empirical), cannot be permanently denied. It is in doubt. That’s why we must keep performing and transforming the interpretations of this relation. Doubt may be the best guarantee of real presence.

(1993: 180)

Of course, the presence of ghosts is always subject to doubt. But I hope that my investigations have indicated how ghosts of queer subjects might offer

transformative potentials. For me queer moments are the best guarantee of real 'presence' and those I have experienced continue to transform, both through my analytical writing and creative practice. It is crucial to adopt provisional, contingent positions to generate such reflexive perspectives on practices, both in performance and in life. That is why, even though I consider myself primarily as a theatre practitioner, it is as a spectator that I have written this thesis: to get a glimpse of what I would like to be doing 'from the other side'.

So, let us return to that position of spectatorship and ask: what happened in that final moment of *Everything Must Go* (2009)? Alice Rayner writes that theatre:

... is where appearance and disappearance reproduce the relations between the living and the dead, not as a form of representation, but as a form of consciousness that has moved beyond dualities and problems of representations without disregarding them.

(2006: xvi)

I like to think that in that moment, when Fredricksson's father appeared on screen, that the performance had negotiated the dualisms of life/death to expose our common human vulnerability.

This performance in a variety of ways was a public confession of Fredricksson's own private mourning. Through offering such radical intimacy, through translating between the various positions of her father's identity, she was producing a tangibly

embodied sense of his absence/presence. When her father ‘appeared’ in action on screen, for a moment I experienced an ‘intensive *interaction* and *interrelationship* with others and with one’s surrounding, in which there [was] something like a “pause” in normative consciousness of self’ (Aston and Harris, 2008: 130). His absence/presence produced a ghost of the queer subject that touched and transformed me, and the stuff that I am made of.

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